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# Instability and Change in Soviet-Dominated Eastern Europe

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An Intelligence Assessment

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EUR 82-10124  
December 1982

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# **Instability and Change in Soviet-Dominated Eastern Europe**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
an independent consultant and retired CIA officer,  
under the auspices of the East European Division,  
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are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief.  
East European Division, EURA [redacted]

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**Scope Note**

In an attempt to place before the policy and intelligence communities provocative analyses by experienced observers, the Directorate of Intelligence occasionally will publish uncoordinated essays of particular merit on important subjects. This is such an essay and the future of Eastern Europe is such a subject. The interpretations and conclusions are the author's own.

The essay examines the complex and troubled relationship between the USSR and Eastern Europe in the recent (postwar) past, studies the evolving nature of that relationship in the present, and assays the likelihood of instability and change, over the longer term. While it cannot predict the precise course of events in an area so potentially volatile, it does foresee a prolonged period of *Sturm und Drang* and the persistence of the struggle between the East European countries, seeking an enlarged sovereignty, and the Soviet Union, striving to deny it.

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**Instability and Change  
in Soviet-Dominated  
Eastern Europe**

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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 23 November 1982  
was used in this report.*

The old notion that the Soviet Union is gearing whole societies in Eastern Europe to its own purposes has in recent years given way to a new truth: the Soviets must now gear themselves and their purposes increasingly to East European realities—severe economic weaknesses, deeply rooted popular discontent, recurrent political disruptions, spreading ideological decay, and a pervasive, often anti-Soviet nationalism. It now seems unlikely, in fact, that the empire can be held together over the long term without some significant alterations in the way it is run. At the very least, the persistence of diversity, disarray, and discord in Eastern Europe will confront the Soviet leadership—itself preoccupied with domestic problems and perhaps troubled by the Brezhnev succession—with heavy pressures for fundamental change.

The history of Soviet relations with Eastern Europe since World War II, and particularly since the death of Stalin in 1953, is rich in turbulence and gore—ranging from riots and attempted coups to revolutions and outright national defections. And the highest levels of unrest and political turmoil were reached during periods of succession crisis in the USSR when, as in the mid-1950s and the late 1960s, the Soviet leadership was rent by political infighting and disputes over policy.

Specifically, the turmoil in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the Stalin succession, 1953-57, contributed significantly to the demoralization of most East European leaderships, the development of serious party factionalism, the reemergence of long-repressed popular disaffection, and the vigorous expression of this disaffection in the political arena. Demands for improved living standards, the democratization of the system, and the end of Soviet controls were particularly strong in Poland and Hungary and led ultimately to nationalist revivals, new leaderships, and a promised about-face in policy in the former and the collapse of the party and a revolution in the latter.

The succession to Khrushchev, which persisted from 1964 until the early 1970s, was much less traumatic, but disagreements and indecision in the oligarchy did add in major ways to instability in Eastern Europe. Romania's ongoing experiment with independence became increasingly abusive; the East German regime of Walter Ulbricht began to speak with its own peculiarly condescending voice; the Zhivkov regime in Bulgaria had to contend with an attempted coup by military officers and former

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partisans, who apparently felt that Moscow lacked the will to interfere; and the party in Prague started to come apart as bemused conservatives began to battle increasingly active reform-minded liberals.

The crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968 posed the most serious threat to Soviet interests in Eastern Europe since the Hungarian revolution: here again, 12 years later, was a series of events which centered on the twin issues of domestic democratization and relations with the USSR, and here again was felt the impact of disagreements among the Kremlin leaders as to how best to damp down the situation and to avoid the secession of a whole people from the Soviet empire.

Gdansk excepted, the 1970s were fairly tranquil in Eastern Europe, though the trend toward diversity and autonomy persisted. But toward the end of the decade, the East European economies began to sag, and the unwritten contract between peoples and regimes—more cooperation for more bread—was endangered and, indeed, in Poland, destroyed. The era of relative tranquility is probably now drawing to a close, not just in Poland, but also in most of the other East European countries. Indeed, two of the primary preconditions for serious disruptions there—succession crises in one or another Bloc capital and severe economic distress—are likely in some states soon to conjoin.

The USSR of course holds the ultimate trump card, overwhelming military power and *in extremis* the will to use it. It also maintains a considerable variety of other, less dramatic tools of persuasion and power. But military intervention has its drawbacks and the Soviets are reluctant to use it, and the other instruments of control and influence by no means constitute a system of absolute authority. The East European regimes, in fact, are able to exercise a sort of conditional sovereignty which, if it poses few real threats to Soviet hegemony, certainly constrains it. And, while attempted defections from the Bloc do not now seem likely, resistance to Soviet dominion will surely persist.

The new Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, will, of course, have to contend with this problem, among many others, but his ability to do so more effectively than his predecessors is open to question. He may bring more self-assurance to the task, and probably will approach issues in a more pragmatic way, but there is no quick and easy cure for what ails Eastern

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Europe and relations within the Bloc. Moreover, Andropov, while apparently dominant in the area of foreign (including East European) affairs, is not likely soon to achieve a clear supremacy in the leadership and will thus probably find himself encumbered by debates among his Politburo colleagues and resistance from influential elements in the party and in the bureaucracies.

Perhaps the greatest problem the Soviet leaders will face in Eastern Europe is the state of the economies, parlous in some countries and nowhere flourishing. Stagnating or declining living standards are particularly dangerous because they damage productivity and stimulate unrest. And none of these regimes enjoys positive popular support. Rather, each counts on a form of popular sufferance, arising from both hope for a better life and fear of harassment and arrest. Now that prospects of the former are fast fading, so is the public's stake in stability. Some regimes may, as a result, place more reliance on fear, which may not work and is in any case economically debilitating; others may eventually succumb to growing pressures for greater freedom and/or radical economic reform.

Troubled by serious and long-neglected economic problems of its own, the Andropov leadership may display little patience vis-a-vis those of Eastern Europe. It may be inclined to urge retrenchment—economic austerity, tougher official crackdowns on dissidents, less reliance on Soviet subsidies, greater integration via CEMA, and, in general, more fidelity to Soviet policies and interests. Given Andropov's apparent approval of economic reform in Hungary, the Soviet regime may at the same time press the East Europeans to move in a Kadarist direction. But if, in fact, Moscow sponsors change—either or both retrenchment and reform—a number of the East European regimes can be expected at a minimum to drag their feet.

Though the Andropov regime may be able to survive for a time without facing large crises in Eastern Europe, *its* successors are less likely to be spared. Younger leaders, drawn from the post-Stalin generation, may be much more innovative than their predecessors. They might, for example: (1) encourage a program of systemic economic reform more ambitious and far reaching than the model provided by Kadar's Hungary; (2) simultaneously or alternatively provide greater substance to the concept of a "Socialist Commonwealth" in which each party-state would have more say about overall Bloc policies and doctrines but would remain bound to the

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USSR; or (3) grant the various countries real independence, taking a path likely to lead to the Finlandization of Eastern Europe—though chances of this seem very remote.

But even a bold program could not score quick successes, and pressures arising out of the East European quest for prosperity and national dignity and sovereignty are much more likely to grow than to subside over the next several years. Indeed, over the course of the next decade there will almost certainly be further outbreaks of serious political strife in Eastern Europe; and they will be directed, at least in part and implicitly, against the Soviet Union. If such strife seems to jeopardize Communist power and/or Soviet hegemony, Moscow will almost certainly intervene, with military force if necessary. Beyond a decade, however, forecasts become much murkier. The resolution through force of recurrent imperial problems that have deep political, economic, and social roots cannot be endlessly appealing in Moscow. Radical changes in the way the Soviets maintain their empire, the local regimes preserve their power, and these regimes conduct their economic affairs do not now seem at all likely, but time, succession struggles, political crises, and economic adversity may whet the appetite for systemic change, even in the Kremlin. And an estimate that part or all of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe will one day find its way to freedom would be consonant with both the lessons of the past and the trends of the present.

25X1

**Confidential**

viii

**Confidential****Contents**

	<i>Page</i>
Scope Note	iii
Key Judgments	v
Introduction	1
The Course of Empire	3
Foundations	3
The Tribulations of Succession	3
The Empire Totters: Poland and Hungary	6
A Khrushchevian Approach and a Romanian Response	7
The Khrushchev Succession	8
The Challenge From Czechoslovakia	10
An Era of (Relative) Tranquility	11
Reenter Poland	12
Lessons for the Soviets	13
Soviet Hegemony in Eastern Europe	15
Diversity and Disorder	15
The Tools of the Imperial Craft	16
The East European Response	18
East European Influence on the USSR	20
Successions and Their Impact	21
The Andropov Succession	21
The New Generation of Soviet Leaders	22
Pressing Policy Problems	23
The Impact on Eastern Europe	25
Succession in Eastern Europe	28
The Future in Eastern Europe	31
Forces at Work	31
A Modest New Soviet Approach	32
The Commonwealth	33
A Radical Alternative	34
The Lethal Option: Soviet Military Intervention	36
The Way of the West	37
Elastic Deformation	38

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## Instability and Change in Soviet-Dominated Eastern Europe

25X1

### Introduction

The ultimate dissolution of empires is, like death and taxes, inevitable. But to the citizen of Athens in, say 200 A.D., bearing the yoke of Rome, or to the resident of Prague in 1968, throwing stones at a Soviet tank, this is a truth that could provide scant comfort. The question for those who suffer the indignities of Soviet overlordship today is not *whether* the Soviet empire is destined to collapse—or explode or disintegrate or simply melt away—but rather in what way and when:

- Seen in the conventional Western perspective of the late 1940s and the early 1950s as a monolithic whole, the empire began to fall apart long ago. Three of its major pieces (Yugoslavia, China, and North Korea), part of another (Romania), and one chip (Albania) have long since been lost, and probably irretrievably so.
- All the remaining European pieces save one (Bulgaria) have tried to escape. To be sure, none has succeeded, but each of the attempts has revealed the seriousness and persistence of general popular disaffection, widespread disenchantment with Communism, and a strong urge for national independence.
- Economically the empire is floundering and the East European states now constitute a questionable asset for the USSR. Politically and ideologically, the empire's very existence—dependent as it is on the Soviets' willingness to use brute force to preserve their hegemony and doctrinal authority—serves to belie Moscow's claims of benevolence and common socialist interests. And militarily, though on paper, important contributors to the USSR's overall strength, the East European members of the Warsaw Pact provide only niggardly support to their defense programs (compared to the Soviet per capita effort) and could in any case field armed forces of only uncertain prowess and dubious reliability.

In view of all this, one is permitted to wonder why the Soviets think that their presence in the area is worth the effort and the costs. Is it still true, for example, that

*... when we speak of the meaning of Eastern Europe in the balance of power, we must . . . think less of its contribution of so many tons of steel, so much grain or so many barrels of oil than of the impact of the fact that whole societies are being geared to the purposes and ends of the Soviet system.<sup>1</sup>*

And is it still the case that

*... it is precisely the accretion of Eastern Europe to the USSR, the expansion of a revolutionary state to a continental system, which gives apparent substance to the communist claim of being the wave of the future.<sup>2</sup>*

For even aside from the fact that so many barrels of oil and bushels of grain now flow in a reverse direction, from east to west, the notion that the East European states are being geared to Soviet purposes is, at most, only a half-truth. To a growing degree, in fact, the Soviets must now gear themselves and their purposes to East European realities—economic weakness, political turbulence, ideological and political polycentrism, overall diversity. And their ultimate goal, whether the eventual establishment of a “Socialist Commonwealth” or the absorption of all these states into the USSR proper, must seem increasingly remote.

<sup>1</sup> Henry L. Roberts, *Eastern Europe: Politics, Revolution and Diplomacy*, New York, 1970, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

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The Communist wave of the future seems, at the same time, to be breaking on the shoals of economic distress and the reefs of East European discontent and resistance. It does so, moreover, in full sight not only of the world at large but also of the non-Bloc Communist parties, which pause and wonder or, more dramatically as in Italy, chose to flee the Soviet surf.

This is not to say, of course, that the Soviets themselves see their problems in this altogether baleful light. Indeed, the view of Eastern Europe from the Kremlin's cloudy windows these days, if not exactly cheering, may not seem all that bad. Poland is now reassuringly subject to strict martial law; Czechoslovakia has apparently learned how to live in a state of semivassalage; East Germany (the GDR) and Bulgaria remain gracefully docile; Hungary experiments, but very carefully; and even troublesome Romania has so many problems at home that it scarcely seems likely to stir up new ones with the Soviet Union.

It may be that the Soviet leaders have deluded themselves into feeling that, given the nature of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe—a motley population approaching 110 million, an area reaching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and a past rich in pride and turbulence—they have done about as well as could reasonably be expected. And the prime mistakes of the past—Stalin's stifling hand, Khrushchev's risky innovations—were not, after all, of their own making.

But if Moscow's prevailing mood were one of self-exculpatory optimism, it would follow that the Soviet leaders could not be wholly aware of the extent and probable durability of their problems in Eastern Europe. They are, in fact, neither stupid nor blind; they can add and subtract, count the number of nationalists on the head of a pin, and recognize adversity in a multiplicity of forms. But it is also true that these men wear deeply tinted ideological blinders; were raised in schools of power, not perception; and feast on and assert ideas and convictions of awesome banality.

They thus do not seem fully to understand—or if they understand, certainly cannot admit—that the difficulties encountered by their own and the East European

economies are systemic, not merely manifestations of temporary snags, bureaucratic shortcomings, and bad weather. They do not comprehend that East European nationalism is a force of such overwhelming size and complexity that it may itself be a wave of the future, and that the Soviet empire cannot be held together indefinitely as an economic, ideological, and security entity without some major change in the way it is run and, as a corollary, some shifts in destinations as well. It hardly needs saying that if these men in fact do not understand these things and will not in the future, then they will not be able to formulate effective policies and implement lasting solutions.

It is true, of course, that Soviet interest and involvement in Eastern Europe have been foreordained by centuries of ethnic, economic, and geopolitical ties, all now reinforced by 40 years of Marxist-Leninist myth. Accordingly, whatever its level of understanding, and independently of its ability to pursue sophisticated policies, neither the Andropov regime nor the next Soviet leadership is likely to find itself presiding over the voluntary dismemberment of empire. But, should he stumble badly, Andropov may, and his successors almost certainly will, confront enormous pressures for change, possibly arising during, or even because of, a struggle for power within the USSR or one or another of the East European countries or, indeed, both. And this, in brief, is the subject of this paper: the nature and outlook for change in Eastern Europe and in Soviet policies there, especially during periods of political succession.

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### **The Course of Empire**

*When a rock falls on an egg, alas for the egg,  
When an egg falls on a rock, alas for the egg.*

*Old Balkan Saying*

#### **Foundations**

The Red Army won the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe on its way to victory in Germany. This was "no accident," as the Soviets say, nor simply a byproduct of geography and the fortunes of war. On the contrary, at least in Stalin's view, the acquisition of the area was necessary for Soviet security—it served the time-honored concept of a buffer zone—and was desirable for the advancement of Soviet policies and doctrines elsewhere in Europe—it would provide a springboard for Soviet expansion. But whether, beyond the achievement of these two goals, Stalin had thought very much about how to govern his new empire, what he wanted it to look like, and where he wanted it to go is not at all clear.

Although he obviously rejected the idea for the immediate postwar period, Stalin may once have envisaged the eventual incorporation of most or all of the East European states into the multinational USSR as constituent republics, in the manner of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. But there were no clear signs of this, and the question is further obscured by Stalin's willingness after the war to permit genuine if conditional sovereignty in Finland, despite the fact that this country had been allied with Germany and had once belonged to Russia. Stalin, of course, wanted to grab as many tangible goods from Eastern Europe as he could, and he did, through reparations and such devices as so-called joint stock companies established to siphon off East European production. He also knew that, after the period of early consolidation of Communist power (1945-47), he would not tolerate any meaningful non-Communist participation in the political affairs of these countries, though he was wary enough of local and Western reactions to pretend that these states remained independent and were "peoples' democracies," rather than simple party dictatorships. After 1948 and the defection of Yugoslavia, he was determined to crush any real or imagined manifestations of "Titoism" or "nationalist deviationism" within the individual Communist parties.

He was also careful to keep tight control over the policies and personnel of these parties and states and to issue orders to their leaders, many of whom were Soviet raised and almost all of whom were Soviet trained, in essentially the same way he issued orders within the Soviet Union, counting on the secret police, the military, and, in general, an atmosphere of terror to keep everyone in line. At the same time, he insisted that each of these countries emulate the Soviet system in its economic, sociopolitical, and cultural entirety.

But beyond control and Sovietization, Stalin's policies remained murky. Some of them were clearly senseless—what purpose, for example, could the quest for autarky in each of these states possibly serve? It was almost as if the aging dictator were indifferent to questions of future development, of political and economic viability. Still, all this worked, albeit crudely, at least so long as Stalin remained in charge. But a multitude of problems was merely being stored for Stalin's heirs.

#### **The Tribulations of Succession**

It became clear almost immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953 that Stalinism without Stalin simply would not work. It was equally clear that, incredibly, Stalin had left his successors an empire but had neglected to bequeath them adequate means of control. The desperate search for an effective alternative to Stalin's personal rule then preoccupied—and often split—the Soviet leadership over the course of the next four years, and the effects of this on Eastern Europe were especially pronounced and proved to be, by 1956, extraordinarily dramatic.

Few East European leaders responded quickly to the new, post-Stalin circumstances in Moscow. But, perhaps intuitively, the people did. Within a few months of Stalin's departure there was a major riot in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, in May, and even more ominously, a sizable workers' insurrection in East Germany in June. The uneasy collective leadership in Moscow, more or less dominated by Georgi Malenkov (after the secret policeman, Beria, had been eliminated), was persuaded even before these outbreaks that living standards throughout the Bloc had to improve, and it

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proclaimed the era of the New Course. Combined with emphasis on the need for "socialist legality" (a diminution of terror), a lessening of tensions with the West, and a relaxation of demands for total conformity vis-a-vis Eastern Europe, the New Course was subsequently adopted by all the East European leaderships—significantly, however, not at the same time, in the same manner, or to an equal degree. A new era of diversity in Eastern Europe had thus begun.

Struggles between Malenkov and the new CPSU First Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, during 1954, and the latter's emergence as the victor in 1955, resulted in some policy ambivalence, the reassertion of some old verities that had been amended by Malenkov—including the primacy of heavy industry—and no little confusion concerning, and substantial retrenchment of, what "liberal" programs had been adopted in Eastern Europe. But Khrushchev, as aware as Malenkov that Stalinism could not be reapplied, actively sought means to ensure a new form of Soviet-East European cohesion, the establishment of more effective and less unpopular regimes, and some way to restore momentum to creaking and badly unbalanced economies. In the process, he found it expedient to allow, within limits, the ruling Communist elites to set their own pace and even to exercise primary control over their own affairs. This was deliberate policy, not merely a pragmatic adjustment to irreversible trends, as, indeed, *Pravda* made explicit fairly early on:

*The historical experience of the Soviet Union and of the People's Democracies shows that, given unity in the chief fundamental matter of ensuring the victory of socialism, various ways and means may be used in different countries to solve the specific problems of socialist construction, depending on historical and national features.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> *Pravda*, 16 July 1955, as quoted by Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc* (New York, 1967), p. 172. Khrushchev, typically, exaggerated this policy in his memoirs, claiming that "in those days we deliberately avoided applying pressure on other Socialist countries. We assumed that every Communist party should, and would, handle its own internal problems by itself." (Strobe Talbot, ed., *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston, 1970), p. 365.) He did, however, leave himself an out by using the term "internal affairs" to describe (and delimit) alleged East European sovereignty; almost anything that concerned the Soviets thus became a question of intra-Bloc affairs.

This, while carefully hedged and hardly a grant of sovereignty, was strong stuff by Stalinist standards. And if it did not exactly move the East European leaders to independent action, it did as "Holy Writ" encourage some of them to try to follow policies much more attuned to actual national needs, and facilitated the appearance of increasingly influential reform factions in various parties. It also paved the way for the later accession to power in Poland and Hungary of homegrown Communists who had been imprisoned during the Stalinist era and who, justifiably or not, had come to personify the quest for national dignity and autonomy.

But even more important than official Soviet toleration of new directions in Eastern Europe were the effects of the USSR's new approach to two other problems, both impinging on the conduct of imperial affairs, but not, as conceived, calculated to alter them. The first was the rapprochement with Yugoslavia begun by Khrushchev in 1955. This, *inter alia*, necessitated public Soviet apologies, Soviet recognition of the legitimacy—for Yugoslavia only—of the Titoist road to Socialism, and, later, the quieting of Soviet condemnation of such unorthodox and previously heretical aspects of that road as worker-council management of industry.

The East European leaders of a Stalinist persuasion—probably a majority—felt betrayed by this. All had applauded Stalin's expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, many had won power by accusing and imprisoning or executing comrades who had allegedly committed Titoist sins, and few had any wish to introduce anything remotely resembling Yugoslav innovations within their own bailiwicks.<sup>4</sup>

But if these leaders felt, as they probably did, that the USSR could inflict no worse a blow to their own ideas and positions than to come to terms with Tito, they

<sup>4</sup> Tito himself, though no saint, had this to say concerning the earlier activities of East European leaders: "These men have their hands soaked in blood, have staged trials, given false information, sentenced innocent people to death." (From *Documents on International Affairs*, 1955 (London, 1958), p. 271, as quoted by Adam B. Ulam in *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67* (New York, 1968), p. 563.)

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**Some Leading Men on the East European Stage in the 1950s . . .**



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**Georgi Malenkov**, who in 1953 inaugurated the post-Stalin "New Course" for Eastern Europe. This was first denounced by rival Khrushchev, then adopted by him after Malenkov's ouster and Siberian exile in 1955.

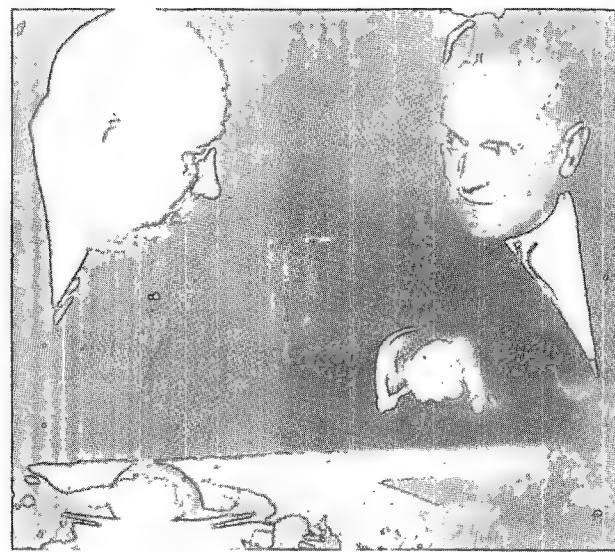


**Matyas Rakosi**, the Hungarian Stalinist strongman and, according to his adversaries, the compleat "skin-haired fathead." Months before the revolution in 1956, Rakosi lost control of the Hungarian Communist Party and was exiled to the USSR.



Pix ©

**Wladislaw Gomulka**, a fallen hero. He was once imprisoned for "nationalist deviations" but was elevated to Polish leadership amidst the post-Stalin turmoil of 1956. He subsequently disappointed the Poles by currying Soviet favor and mismanaging the economy; was tossed out of power in 1970.



Wide World ©

**Khrushchev and Tito**, former foes who developed a wary friendship. The former's apologies to the latter for the way Stalin had (mis)treated Yugoslavia had a lot to do with the disruptive events that followed in Poland and Hungary a year later.



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were badly mistaken. Khrushchev induced even greater trauma by vigorously assaulting Stalin in his secret speech to the 20th Soviet Party Congress early in 1956. His principal purposes were conceived in the context of Soviet political life but were by no means confined to it. On the contrary, in Khrushchev's view, the needs of the empire as a whole, not just his own and those of the USSR, demanded changes in both form and substance, and this in turn required that the greatest of all opponents of change, Josef Stalin's omnipresent ghost, be exorcised once and for all.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Empire Totters: Poland and Hungary**

In retrospect it is not surprising that the momentous events of the mid-1950s—the death of Stalin, the succession struggle that followed, the accord with Tito, and Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin—plunged the Soviet empire into the gravest crisis it has ever faced. It was not, however, so obvious at the time. The shattering events of 1956 in Poland and Hungary were not generally foreseen in the West—the notion that individual Communist parties could undergo major transformations from *within* was not widely credited—and thus the West was not prepared to react.<sup>6</sup> There should be some solace for the West, however, in the knowledge that the Soviets, while infinitely better informed, were at least equally unprepared for the events that erupted in their own backyard, events which they had themselves inadvertently set in motion.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Wladislaw Gomulka's return to power in Poland in October 1956, after years of imprisonment, stunned the Soviet leaders. In mid-October, sans

<sup>5</sup> Some of the feelings of old-line Communists at the time came through, almost plaintively, in the pages of the ordinarily unemotional Czech party daily, *Rude Pravo*: "Much has happened this year. Much that was dear to us has been smashed. Our souls are full of pain because strings have suddenly been touched which we thought inviolable and feelings which were dear to us. . . . many an old Communist will feel sadness. He may even feel bitter." As quoted by Wolfgang Leonhard, *The Kremlin Since Stalin* (New York, 1962), p. 203. Leonhard is well worth reading for his account of de-Stalinization and its impact in a chapter titled "The Year of Hope and Confusion."

<sup>6</sup> The West also failed to apprehend the real nature of the Soviet-East European relationship—and what would happen to it after the architect and enforcer of that relationship, Stalin, had died—and to appreciate the vigor and force of East European nationalism.

<sup>7</sup> Khrushchev admits this in his memoirs: "[The Hungarian] mutiny had been engendered by Stalin's abuse of power and . . . the seeds of discontent had been sown by Stalin's adviser, Rakosi." (Talbot, op cit, p. 427).

invitation, they hurriedly flew to Warsaw as a group, to confront Gomulka and his colleagues at the airport, initially with a string of obscenities, then with some hard bargaining. While this bargaining ultimately paid off for the Soviets, the world was treated to the hitherto unprecedented spectacle of self-anointed as opposed to Soviet-appointed East European leaders *negotiating* with their "bettters" about such crucial issues as independent and much more democratic roads to Socialism, the sanctity of the Soviet system and Soviet ideology, and, in general, the degree of autonomy to be exercised by previously subordinate regimes. The lesson was, of course, not lost on the Hungarians.

The Hungarian revolution, at once heroic and tragic, needs no recounting here. Some of its implications, however, deserve quick scrutiny insofar as they reflect the art of the possible in Eastern Europe and Soviet attitudes and sensibilities, particularly during periods of political travail:

- The Soviet leadership, still consumed by the politics of succession and divided by issues of policy and purpose vis-a-vis both domestic and East European problems, found itself unable to control or cope successfully with the crisis in Hungary.
- The Soviets' vacillating reactions to the turmoil in Hungary encouraged the Hungarians to move faster and further than anyone had initially contemplated. The new Hungarian leader, Imre Nagy, responded in the main to pressures emanating from the rapidly diversifying Hungarian body politic rather than from the Soviet Politburo.
- The Soviets could scarcely believe what was happening in their erstwhile protectorate: the appearance among the people of a feeling of violent hostility to the Soviets and their puppets, a psychological condition one Western observer has called ecstatic emancipation; the almost complete breakdown of Communist and Soviet instruments of power; the establishment of a wide variety of non- and anti-Communist political parties; the founding in western Hungary of an independent "Trans-Danubian

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Republic"; the hanging by feet or neck of Communists (mostly secret policemen) from Budapest lamp-posts; the unwillingness of the Hungarian military to intervene; and the announcement of impending neutralism (a la Austria) and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.

Until this latter move by Nagy, the Soviets had apparently hoped that he and the Communist Party would be able to maintain essential control and that Hungary—though greatly changed internally and more independent externally—would survive as a client state. Some Soviet leaders, Khrushchev probably among them, were apparently willing to settle for this, at least until stronger Soviet controls could be reasserted; others were no doubt opposed to even a temporary relaxation of the relationship and favored military intervention early on. Nagy's declaration of an impending withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact on 31 October (while two Soviet leaders, Mikoyan and Suslov, were actually in Budapest to study the situation) probably ended the disagreement, and the Soviets attacked on 4 November.

While the Soviets were not directly responsible for the great swell of protest in Hungary and Poland in 1956, the post-Stalin ambiguities, inaptitudes, and angst of the leaders in Moscow, together with their constant political maneuvering against one another, made it possible for the forces in Eastern Europe to press so vigorously and even violently for two interdependent goals, independence and democratization.<sup>8</sup>

By exhibiting uncertainty about how to treat these issues and forces, by compounding the problem by destroying the awesome posthumous authority of Stalin and failing to find any replacement for it, and, finally, by severely weakening in this way the power of the most pro-Soviet elements in the various Communist hierarchies, the Soviets had badly wounded themselves in their own East European foot. Though Moscow ultimately recovered, the recuperation was painful and incurred a high long-term cost: from now

<sup>8</sup> Gomulka himself in 1956 clearly and explicitly laid out these two fundamental elements at issue: "The political differences in the leadership of the party . . . can be reduced to two basic problems: (1) the conception of Poland's sovereignty; and (2) the conception of what should be included in what we call the democratization of our life within the framework of the socialist system" (as quoted by Brzezinski, *op cit*, p. 251).

on, Soviet interests, while still paramount, would have to take divergent East European interests into more serious account. The Soviet leaders had discovered, *inter alia*, that while "their doctrine was rich in guidelines for coping with enemies . . . it offered little for resolving conflicts and organizing relations among Communist states."<sup>9</sup>

**A Khrushchevian Approach and a Romanian Response**  
For seven years from 1957 through most of 1964, an imperfect and uneasy calm prevailed between the USSR and its European allies (Albania, which left the Bloc in 1961, excepted). The Soviets, under Khrushchev, who had by 1957 achieved a precarious supremacy over his colleagues, tolerated a measure of diversity but their guidance was neither clear nor consistent. This tolerance was to a degree pressed on Moscow by two external factors, the exigencies of the Sino-Soviet conflict and the requirements of an increasingly active (and demanding) policy of detente with the West. The first in essence provided the East European states with greater latitude to behave independently, the second restrained any tendency the Soviets may have felt to crack down on such behavior.

Khrushchev, well aware of the intractability of the East European problem in the wake of Hungary and Poland, wanted to preserve the Bloc and the USSR's authority in it by relying on the good sense and self-interest of East European leaders who knew that their survival could be endangered, on the one hand, by their anti-Communist constituents and, on the other, by the USSR's demonstrated willingness to use force. In return for their fidelity, Khrushchev in effect promised a better deal for these leaders—much improved economic relations, some freedom to determine domestic policies, and substantial political authority, especially concerning their own parties. Thus, there emerged an unwritten compact that sanctified both the autonomy of the East European parties and the limits imposed on this autonomy by the greater needs of the USSR and the Bloc.

Khrushchev understood, however, that to ensure Soviet hegemony, something more was needed. Thus, he also emphasized the development of economic integration via the Council of Economic Mutual Assistance

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 267.

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(CEMA), military integration through the Warsaw Pact, and ideological unity and orthodoxy through a variety of bilateral and multilateral conferences, exchange programs, joint declarations, the establishment of a Soviet-dominated international Communist journal, *The World Marxist Review* (published in Prague), and so on. For a variety of reasons, however, none of this worked very well; in fact, relationships remained for the most part bilateral, as the seemingly endless rounds of meetings between Khrushchev and the individual East European leaders demonstrated most tellingly.<sup>10</sup>

In 1964, encouraged by tacit (and later explicit) support from the Chinese, provoked by an apparent Soviet attempt to remove Gheorghiu-Dej from leadership, and incensed by a Soviet scheme to turn Romania's economy into a semicolonial raw materials supplier for the more advanced members of CEMA, the Romanian Workers' Party in effect publicly declared its independence.<sup>11</sup> But Romania's move and, thereafter, any number of vivid expressions of its independence—including disruptions of Soviet plans for CEMA, close relations with China, and an undeclared alliance with Tito's Yugoslavia—did not prove to be contagious elsewhere in the Bloc. Partly as a consequence, partly because, to Moscow's relief, the Romanian party remained in firm control at home, and partly because the Soviet Union could do little to suppress the heresy short of armed intervention, the Soviets grudgingly learned to live with the problem.

<sup>10</sup> This led to the development of fairly close personal relations between Khrushchev and many of these leaders, Gomulka prominent among them. This would come back to haunt Khrushchev's successors in 1964.

<sup>11</sup> See the "Statement on the Stand of the Romanian Workers' Party Concerning the Problems of the World Communist and Working Class Movement," (April 1964) which asserted Romanian sovereignty in unequivocal terms and in the context of Soviet efforts to curtail it. (A full text appears in William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 269-296.) There were many reasons why the Romanian party took this step and why the Soviets reacted to it—and to a variety of subsequent Romanian challenges to their leadership—with restraint. They are summarized in Peter A. Toma, ed., *The Changing Face of Communism in Eastern Europe*, chapter 2, Stephen Fisher-Galati, "The Socialist Republic of Romania," pp. 3-37 (Tuscon, 1970); and by J. F. Brown in *Relations Between the Soviet Union and Its East European Allies: A Survey* (Rand, Santa Monica, 1975), pp. 90-99.

Romania has nonetheless shown the way to a new form of East European sovereignty and, unless the Ceausescu regime is toppled (a growing possibility) by a pro-Soviet faction (less likely), the precedent could one day come to confound the post-Brezhnev Soviet leadership.

#### The Khrushchev Succession

Khrushchev was removed from power in the fall of 1964, a victim of his own excesses and his inability to anticipate the capacity of his immediate colleagues to conspire against him. Despite their vigorous denunciations of Khrushchev's style and his penchant for radical solutions, the successors were quick not only to proclaim continuity in policy in general but also continuity in policy toward Eastern Europe in particular (the maintenance of "fraternal relations with the Socialist countries" and of the "collaboration of free peoples who enjoy equal rights").<sup>12</sup>

But most of the East European leaders were shocked by Khrushchev's ouster and by the (understandable) failure of the plotters to provide them with advance notice. Some had become quite close to Khrushchev and probably felt they were able to influence his decisions; many no doubt were concerned that the new Soviet leadership would jeopardize the existing relationship by insisting on greater Bloc conformity to Moscow's wishes.

In any case, these leaders—even the most faithful among them, including Ulbricht and Novotny—made no secret of their unhappiness, expressed reservations about the coup, and conspicuously failed to participate in the recitation of Khrushchev's alleged sins. Thus did the East Europeans, refusing to support the CPSU in its hour of need, demonstrate anew their ability to act on their own.

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**A Survivor, a Pedant, a Tragedian, and Just Another Pretty Cult of Personality**



**Enver Hoxha**, a bloody-minded man who became the Albanian Communist leader in the same year that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. He has in the past switched sides from Yugoslavia to the Soviet Union to China. Now he and his country have no foreign friends at all.



**Walter Ulbricht** of East Germany, senior Communist statesman, who looked down on Khrushchev's successors in Moscow. Brezhnev and company didn't much care for this—or Ulbricht's unconcealed distaste for detente—and eased him out in 1971.



**Alexander Dubcek**, the Czechoslovak leader with the all-too-human socialist face. In 1968 he was arrested by the invading Soviets, released to play front man for a while, then finally in 1969, was retired in disgrace.



**Nicolae Ceausescu**, founder of a dynasty in Romania and the USSR's least favorite Latin. He looks pretty good defying the Soviets but pretty bad running his own country.



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As it turned out, however, the new Soviet leaders did honor the unwritten contract on the relationship that had emerged during the Khrushchev years, and Soviet-East European relations remained relatively quiet during the first three years of the new Soviet regime. But during the same period the collective leadership in Moscow sometimes found itself at odds over both issues of policy and questions of power, and, partly as a consequence, the East Europeans were able to assert growing authority over their own affairs. Romania's experiment with sovereignty became openly abusive; the Zhivkov regime in Bulgaria was subjected to an attempted coup by military officers and former partisans, who might have felt that the new leadership in Moscow would not interfere;<sup>13</sup> the East German regime of Walter Ulbricht began to speak with its own peculiarly condescending voice about its own ideological creativity and its own biases vis-a-vis West Germany; and the party in Prague started to come apart as bemused conservatives began to battle increasingly vigorous reform-minded liberals.

#### **The Challenge From Czechoslovakia**

The crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1968 posed the most serious threat to Soviet interests in Eastern Europe and to the Soviet system itself since the Hungarian revolution. Here again, 12 years later, was a series of events centered on the twin issues of domestic democratization and relations with the USSR: Soviet mis-handling of events from the very onset of the crisis;<sup>14</sup> the pressure of new-wave politics threatening to get out of hand, with potentially disastrous results for the monopoly power of the party and the position of the

<sup>13</sup> This surprising event, apparently "the only indigenous military coup ever organized within a European Communist state"—with the possible, partial recent exception of Poland—is discussed by Myron Rush in *How Communist States Change Their Rulers* (Ithaca, 1974), pp. 110-112 and, as cited by Rush, by J. F. Brown in *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (New York, 1970), pp. 173-189.

<sup>14</sup> Novotny was voted out of the first-secretaryship by the Czechoslovak party in early January 1968. It had been clear during the preceding fall, however, that his position was in jeopardy. Brezhnev, visiting Prague in December, presumably on Novotny's invitation, refused to give full support to Novotny, making it clear "that the Czechoslovak leadership was free to oust Novotny if it so desired" (Rush, op cit, p. 139). Thus, by standing aside, Brezhnev—perhaps reflecting indecision in Moscow—avoided an immediate problem but probably compounded the long-term one.

Soviet Union vis-a-vis that party;<sup>15</sup> and, finally, despite constant reassurances of continuing fidelity to the USSR, the specter of neutralism and Western inroads in a key area of the Bloc.

*However great one's sense of moral outrage in the face of Soviet suppression of the liberal experiment in Czechoslovakia, it cannot be claimed that . . . Soviet fears [of the events in Prague] were unjustified. The Prague Spring was by far the most virulent case of revisionism that Leninism in power had faced throughout its history. . . . Had the Prague Spring been permitted to survive, the Soviets would have been rightly more fearful than at any time since 1956, not only for their East European hegemony, but also for their own Leninist party-state system as they know it.<sup>16</sup>*

And yet, while this enormous challenge was emerging during the early months of 1968 and burst into flower in the spring and summer, the guardians of "scientific socialism" in the Soviet Union may not have been able to agree on its size and scope and how best to combat it.

To be sure, by March 1968 it had become clear to the Soviets—and to the equally alarmed Poles and East Germans—that, if their momentum continued, the

<sup>15</sup> Some Western observers maintain that the principal Soviet fear at the time was that the Czech party would fall under the control of its "progressive" faction, which would free itself from Soviet authority, *not* that the party would lose power altogether. See Christopher Jones, *Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1981), p. 58. This contention seems to overlook the implications of the actual course of events during the first seven months of 1968; *inter alia*, the "progressive" wing of the party, which did win dominance, was not strong enough to resist popular pressures for a thorough democratization of national political life—and in effect the surrender of the party's monopoly of power—even had it wished to do so, which is doubtful. While certainly opposed to the "progressives" (revisionists), Moscow preferred working with them (as they did in Poland in October 1956) to the alternative, intervening with troops.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz Ermath, *Internationalism, Security, and Legitimacy: The Challenge to Soviet Interests in East Europe, 1964-1968* (Rand, Santa Monica, 1969), p. 61.

**Confidential**

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events in Czechoslovakia could constitute a menace to the Soviet Union and the Bloc as a whole.<sup>17</sup> But the collective leadership in Moscow was not at all sure how best to proceed beyond exhorting the excited Czechs to calm down.

*Should [the Soviet leaders] attempt to reverse or merely limit post-January developments in Czechoslovakia; if limit, how should the limits be defined? What tactics should be employed to enforce Soviet will? While it remains as yet impossible to document them, differences within the Politburo must certainly have arisen over these questions very early. The result was a Soviet diplomatic performance too convoluted and contradictory to be termed subtle. It was at once clumsy and indecisive.<sup>18</sup>*

In hindsight it seems reasonable to assume that at least until the summer, some Soviet leaders (perhaps Brezhnev and the ideologist Suslov among them), even while no doubt afflicted with gloom, still sought a way out, and still hoped that an invasion would not prove necessary. The Czechoslovak party leader, Alexander Dubcek, they thought, could be forced into accommodation, could be made to control his own party, and could be coerced to take the necessary steps to reassert the party's dictatorship.

Other leaders were probably less prone to rationalization and less reluctant to use force, sensing in the Czechoslovak experiment a dangerous model for all Eastern Europe. (Both the East German and Polish

<sup>17</sup> In this context, one concern of the Soviets at the time was the appearance of an incipient alliance between Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, a revival, as it were, of the prewar Little Entente. But none of the partners expected the Soviets to resort to military force in Czechoslovakia (or elsewhere), and so, whatever the purposes of such a partnership, they did not see it primarily as a deterrent to Soviet aggression. In particular, the Yugoslavs felt that the Czechs had avoided Nagy's mistakes (withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, and so forth) and that the Soviets had evolved too far from Stalinism and were too interested in the maintenance of East-West detente to seriously contemplate armed action against Czechoslovakia. See Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974* (Berkeley, 1978), p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> Ermath, op cit, p. 67.

regimes adhered to this view; the Romanians and Yugoslavs vigorously opposed it.) Indecision and compromise—necessitated by a form of collective rule in which Brezhnev was usually dominant but not supreme—may have been responsible for the actual shape of Soviet policy; that is, the peculiar combination of correct party-to-party relations with the Dubcekian heretics, warnings of severe political and economic countermeasures (few if any of which were actually implemented), the maneuvers and entry into Czechoslovakia in June of the Soviet military, its subsequent (temporary) withdrawal, and the peculiar meetings between Soviet and Czech leaders at Bratislava and Cierna in July and August.

As in Hungary during the brief period in 1956 when the Soviet military disengaged and partly withdrew and then attacked, the anomalies in all this could have reflected simply a graduated response or concealed outright duplicity, to gain time for the later massive blow. But the case for this is not persuasive, especially in view of signs (and reports) of Soviet floundering during both crises. Indeed, even the Soviets' handling of Dubcek *after* the invasion in August 1968—his kidnaping and forced trip to the USSR, his subsequent release, and then, bewilderingly, his reinstatement in office—is more suggestive of confusion and disagreement than of a carefully crafted plot.

#### An Era of (Relative) Tranquillity

Withal, after 1968 the Soviets began to display a more knowing and more sophisticated approach to their problems in Eastern Europe. Surprisingly Brezhnev, who thereafter was able more and more to assume control in the Politburo, seems not to have concluded from his Czech experience that all manifestations of individualistic behavior in Eastern Europe had to be eliminated at the outset. This was true in Czechoslovakia itself, where the stifling of dissent and the removal of the liberals were carried out only over time and did not result in a revival of Stalinist terror. Similarly, threats of military intervention in Romania, prominent during the fall of 1968, were played

Confidential

down and then extinguished; the Poles were allowed to handle the Baltic riots of 1970 and Gomulka's subsequent removal without interference; the political retirement of the troublesome Walter Ulbricht from the helm in East Germany was accomplished with quiet skill; and the innovative reform movement in Hungary was permitted to proceed.

At the same time, though integration under CEMA was pushed even harder, the East Europeans were encouraged directly and by Soviet example to increase economic ties with the West. (The volume of trade between the West and the East European states virtually tripled between 1960 and 1971.) Clearly, though fearful of growing Western influence in the area, Brezhnev and Co. understood not only that Eastern Europe, like the USSR, needed Western goods, know-how, and credits, but also believed that "the economic strengthening of Eastern Europe could help to enhance domestic political stability in the area; might relieve the USSR of certain economic burdens . . . and could lead to a growing East European contribution . . . to the process of economic advancement in the USSR itself."<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, Soviet restraint vis-a-vis Eastern Europe took place in the context of an active and forward Soviet policy of detente in Western Europe. This, in turn, rested on the Soviets' growing confidence in their ability to maintain hegemony in their sphere (after demonstrating their determination to do so in Czechoslovakia) and increasing optimism about their prospects in Western Europe (where the reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia had been short lived and overtaken by the momentum of West Germany's *Ostpolitik*). For much of the 1970s in fact, Eastern Europe appeared to be tranquil and Western Europe seemed to be susceptible. Any temptation in Moscow to crack down on wayward trends in the empire was constrained by a strong Soviet desire to exploit the West Europeans' weariness with the Cold War, their anxiety for peace, and—through expanded economic relations with the East—their expectations of profit.

#### Reenter Poland

The Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980-81 may have posed the most serious nonviolent indigenous threat to Soviet interests and influence yet mounted in Eastern Europe. The Hungarian freedom fighters of 1956 and the Czechoslovak democratic revisionists of 1968 could be overwhelmed by military force, and the threat of Polish national Communism in 1956 could be restrained and ultimately dissolved by adroit maneuvering. But the rise of the Polish working-class movement to a position of power at least comparable to that of the Polish party itself represented a new kind of challenge to Communist legitimacy and Soviet security. It was a challenge, moreover, that might be especially difficult for the Soviets to quell with brute force without, in the process, entailing the risk of a bloody, if short, war with Poland.

Tangible signs of severe worker unrest in Poland go back more than a quarter of a century to the riots in Poznan in the summer of 1956 and include the near-revolution of the workers on the Baltic coast in 1970. These events, though tripped by economic complaints, were also political since the workers were expressing profound resentment over their own lack of power and in each instance vented their wrath against the reigning Communist authorities, both regional and national.

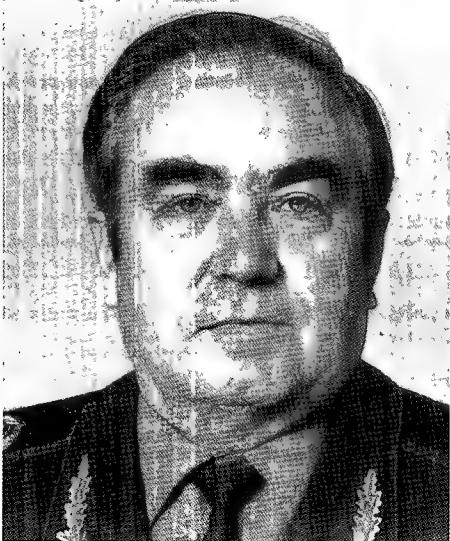
The accession to top leadership of Edward Gierek in 1970 was made possible by Gomulka's inability to cope with the workers' insistence on higher standards of living and a share in the formulation of economic policies. Gierek promised to raise living standards and to heed the workers' complaints and, for several years thereafter, governed with their implicit sufferance. But the economy began to sag in the late 1970s, partly as a consequence of Gierek's profligate mismanagement, and his standing with the workers declined apace. Finally in 1980 Gierek lost his job, and his successors faced an ever-growing list of popular demands, including legal recognition of the right of the workers to strike and to organize free trade unions. As it turned out, the new leaders' willingness to deal with

25X1

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12

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**Proconsul and Pole: An Unhappy Two-Group**

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**Soviet Marshal Viktor G. Kulakov**, Commander in Chief of Warsaw Pact forces, who was the Brezhnev team's acting proconsul in Warsaw in 1981-82. It didn't take him long to find out that Poland is no joke.



Liaison ©

**General Wojciech Jaruzelski**, no patriot to the Poles, nevertheless is probably no pushover for the Soviets. It looks as if he's a survivor, but success—vis-a-vis his own unhappy people and the faltering Polish economy—will probably elude him.

an independent power bloc (Solidarity) began a process of official capitulation. This was, in the main, nervous, hesitant, and grudging, but it was facilitated at times by elements in the party which sought reforms within the party and were sympathetic to Solidarity's proletarian origins and its enormous patriotic appeal, if not its specific program and its apparent willingness to disrupt the nation's economy.

The solution pressed on the Poles by an increasingly alarmed Soviet leadership was, of course, martial law. This approach was hitherto untried in the Bloc but consistent with aspects of Polish traditions and, as it has turned out (because it has so far worked), appropriate to unprecedented circumstances.

**Lessons for the Soviets**

Though the crisis in Poland was in the end contained in a manner satisfactory to Moscow, the Soviets have little reason to congratulate themselves. On the contrary, the aging leadership in the Kremlin was simply not able to respond quickly and effectively and would be hard put to persuade even its most devoted followers that it had handled itself well or resolved its problems in Poland and Eastern Europe in any fundamental, lasting way.<sup>20</sup>

Once again, the Soviets demonstrated in Poland that they were reluctant to face up to the growing possibility of crisis. By mid-September of 1980, after two months of frenzied contention between Polish workers and politicians, it had become clear that the latter were in retreat. But it was then too late for the Soviets to insist that the party mount a direct political assault on Solidarity and too late to count on the unity and strength of that party to preserve its own position in

<sup>20</sup> One school of thought holds that, in part as a sort of first step in the Brezhnev succession struggle, members of the Soviet Politburo very seriously disagreed over how to deal with the Polish crisis—in particular, over the question of military intervention—and that the Soviet military was heavily involved in the dispute. (See Richard D. Anderson, "Soviet Decision-Making and Poland," *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1982, pp. 22-36.) That there was indeed some disagreement over tactics seems altogether plausible, but the article cited fails to make a persuasive case that a faction favoring invasion was able, twice, to order mobilization and that a faction (headed by Brezhnev) opposed to invasion was able, twice, to order demobilization.

25X1

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the power structure. By the beginning of 1981 it was even too late (and the situation too complex) to force a retreat by Solidarity simply by threatening the use of the Soviet Armed Forces.

The Soviets had discovered in 1956 that their post-Stalin grant of autonomy to the Poles precluded the simple issuance of orders to acquiescent subordinates. But over the years, though they were certainly aware of the hostility of the Polish people, they may have convinced themselves that the congruence of Soviet and Polish interests, their fraternal relations with both Gomulka and Gierek, their relative noninterference in Polish affairs, and their "benevolent" concern for Polish welfare in general had restored their prestige and authority in Warsaw to the point, at least, where Polish leaders in need of aid would eagerly seek and respond to their advice—if not necessarily their instructions.

It did not work out that way. During most of the crisis in 1980-81, the Polish leadership, though weakened by internal divisions and the confrontation with Solidarity, nonetheless acted as a surprisingly independent entity, negotiating with Moscow rather than capitulating to it. Even at the end, it is not at all clear that Jaruzelski, as some Westerners maintain, surrendered to the Soviets; rather, as others assert, he may well have moved primarily because he feared Solidarity and its threat to the established order, and he wished to forestall a threatened Soviet invasion.

The distinction may seem academic. Poland is under martial law whatever the motives behind it, and undeniably, this was the course urged and welcomed by Moscow. But it was the last course available to the Soviets short of invasion, and it was a move inspired in the main by desperation. If Jaruzelski believes essentially that he acted for his own reasons and even to serve Polish interests, and he is surrounded by like-minded men in and out of the Polish military, then Poland has preserved a measure of sovereignty which could one day return to plague the Soviet Union anew.

Beyond this, there was much in the Polish crisis to inspire fear and loathing in Moscow. The largest and perhaps closest of all the USSR's allies in Eastern

Europe had come perilously close to at least partial secession from the empire. After a reign of almost 40 years, the Communist regime, governed by men presumably skilled in the art of politics and suppression and backed by the power of the USSR, had all but fallen apart. It had almost succumbed to forces that were unarmed, unsophisticated, and (relatively) unorganized. And these forces were not counterrevolutionaries or fascists or Western agents but the workers in whose very name the regime professed to rule.

Even if, as seems probable, the Soviets did not see matters precisely in this light, they could not have avoided a painful feeling of *deja vu* and rekindled apprehensions about the future. Except in propaganda utterances that must ring hollow even to their authors, recurrent outbreaks of anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism can no longer be explained away by references to class enemies, Western imperialism, and the like. Some leading figures in the Soviet Union, even if they do not question the need to maintain the empire, must be dismayed by their paucity of influence at key junctures, the fragility of the Communist party's hold on a theoretically subjugated society, and their ultimate dependence on brute force to maintain their position (or a semblance thereof). They must wonder if part of the problem does not lie in their system, at least as it is applied in Eastern Europe, and if that system should not be changed accordingly.

25X1

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**Confidential****Soviet Hegemony in Eastern Europe**

*The events of recent years have made it plain that the Communist camp is neither homogenous, monolithic, nor unchanging.*

*Zbigniew Brzezinski  
(1967)*

**Diversity and Disorder**

Eastern Europe is more a label of convenience than a reference to homogeneity. The Republic of Montenegro in Yugoslavia bears little resemblance politically, economically, culturally, or geographically to, say, Bohemia in Czechoslovakia or the province of Bialystok in northeastern Poland. Albania, a bizarre and backward state, was for many years a client of China but is now an independent and isolationist Balkan redoubt. East Germany, though a member of the USSR's East European Bloc, is not even in Eastern Europe. And so on, the point being that diversity in the area, and in the Bloc, is not a recent or superficial phenomenon. The uniformity imposed by Stalin and maintained to a lesser degree by his successors (except over Albania), however, is in a sense both. It is as if the Soviets had covered these states with a thin fabric which conceals much of the varied, mountainous topography beneath but does not flatten it or, as we have already seen, eliminate the occasionally active volcano.

Within the specific context of how the Soviets maintain their fabric, especially in those areas where it is rent or worn, and how those beneath it react—are they content to remain in its shadow or do they seek sunlight?—the observer is faced with problems of perception and measurement and even definition:

- The Soviets possess substantial power in Sofia but rarely seem to need to exercise it. The Bulgarian leaders not only act swiftly to conform to Moscow's expressed wishes, they are also adept at anticipating them, dancing to their superior's tune even before it is played.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Put another way: "The role the present Bulgarian leadership appears to see itself in vis-a-vis the Soviet Union is obviously not that of a subservient lackey but of a faithful lieutenant, entrusted with certain responsibilities and receiving in turn certain favors—indeed, almost a genuinely feudal relationship" (J. F. Brown, *op cit*, p. 53).

- The Soviets wield comparable power in Prague, but here the situation is much more complex, requiring close Soviet attention, frequent interventions, and some willingness to heed the opinions of the Czechoslovak leadership.
- The East German leaders accept Soviet authority but, short on humility and long on pride of accomplishment, they do not reflexively bow to Soviet wisdom, nor do they shy from proffering advice of their own.
- The Soviet position in Poland rests on uncertain foundations. Instructions are received but may be resisted, partly because the military regime is not simply a creature of the Soviets, partly because circumstances—popular opposition, the power of the Church, for example—make compliance difficult. On balance, if the Soviets' ultimate hegemony is not challenged, aspects of their operational authority probably are.
- In Budapest the relationship is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Hungarians move on their own to reassure and placate, and they seem never to challenge the Soviets directly. On the other, they feel free to innovate at home—keeping Big Brother reasonably well-informed but not always seeking his advance consent—and sometimes to behave as Hungarians (not simple satraps) abroad. Thus, to paraphrase the old saw, the Hungarians may be content to enter the revolving door behind the Soviets, but they exert every effort to leave it ahead of them.
- There remains Romania, a country that has raised the level of national Communist politics to an art. Party and state leader Ceausescu has successfully redefined the role of a member of the Bloc, maintaining ties that are mostly formal and confining Soviet influence almost entirely to the negative. Ceausescu accepts certain limits on his country's sovereignty but, within these, he accepts neither advice nor inspiration.

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**The Tools of the Imperial Craft**

Most of the East European Bloc states thus no longer deserve the demeaning appellation "satellite," for if they remain in orbit they do so at a further remove or in a much more eccentric ellipse. This does not mean, of course, that the center of this system has lost its gravitational pull or simply given up its means of influence and control. On the contrary, the USSR has maintained a considerable variety of instruments of persuasion and power, both tangible and intangible. Among them:

**Force of Arms.** The USSR is no stranger to the application of armed force or the threat to use such force. The threat by itself has failed on occasion, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but seemed partly to work in Poland, and no doubt helped to head off crises elsewhere. Whatever, the existence of Moscow's overwhelming military capability, together with its demonstrated willingness to use it and to justify it ideologically via the Brezhnev Doctrine, constitutes a pervasive instrument of ultimate control, the most potent deterrent to East European defection the Soviets possess.<sup>22</sup> Once employed, of course, it is brutally effective, at least for a time. There is a drawback, however: the Soviets do not want to use it because, among other things, it incurs political costs abroad and is tantamount to a confession of policy failure. This reluctance, moreover, is by now generally recognized in Eastern Europe, where the lesson of past Soviet interventions and noninterventions has been twofold: Moscow will move militarily if need be, but it will pay a price to avoid the necessity. This understanding, in turn, provides the East Europeans with some real, though circumscribed, leverage of their own (for example, Romania).

<sup>22</sup> As first (turgidly) enunciated (in *Pravda*, 25 September 1968), the Brezhnev Doctrine asserts that, though the peoples and parties of each Socialist country "must have freedom to determine their country's path of development... any decision of theirs must damage neither socialism in their own country nor the fundamental interests of the other socialist country nor the worldwide worker's movement"... Ergo, "every Communist Party is responsible not only to its own people but also to all socialist countries and to the entire Communist movement... The sovereignty of individual socialist countries cannot be counterposed to the interests of world socialism and the world revolutionary movement."

**Institutional Ties.** While perhaps not as binding as the Soviets would like to see, a great variety of these means are available—diplomatic relations; treaty obligations; membership in Blocwide bodies (CEMA, the Warsaw Pact, various councils and committees of both); official party-to-party contacts; international Communist conferences, scientific congresses; educational, cultural, and academic exchanges; and notably, secret police ties. (The KGB must seem almost as omnipresent in most of Eastern Europe as in the USSR; while its influence is surely less—in part because largely indirect—it nonetheless plays a major part in the preservation of Soviet influence, and Andropov will surely seek to keep it that way.) This panoply of persistent relationships forms a complicated web designed and used by the Soviets to exercise dominance, curb disaffection, and, not so incidentally, to keep informed. Still, though generally effective, institutional strings are much too diffuse and too remotely controlled to form a single instrument of control; moreover, some of the most important strands, for example, CEMA, are vulnerable to East European expressions of self-interest and recalcitrance.

**Relations Among Leaders.** This is a vital aspect of the relationship which is at once tangible and intangible. Meetings between Soviet and East European leaders (usually bilateral, except during international Communist conclaves, including party congresses) provide the former an opportunity to deliver lectures, provide counsel, apply pressure, and occasionally demand accommodation. Most East European leaders probably find themselves listening to their Soviet mentors attentively, though the days of bowing and scraping are mostly over. And once in a while, the visitor may decide to give as good as he gets.

**Congruent Interests.** While they often operate at cross-purposes with Moscow's designs, some purely national East European interests—specific interests not common to the Bloc as a whole—can also be an important element in Moscow's arsenal of influence. Poland's and Czechoslovakia's fear of German *revanchism* and the East German regime's fear and hatred

Confidential

Confidential

of West Germany are prominent cases in point. So too is Bulgaria's hostility toward Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. Less obvious, but potentially significant, are the quarrels among the Bloc states themselves, which, among other things, pretty much preclude East European unity vis-a-vis the Soviets. The USSR ordinarily represses but on occasion exploits such quarrels, for instance, the Romanian-Hungarian dispute over Transylvania and ill will between the Czech lands and Slovakia.

There are, in addition, a bundle of interests and attitudes common to one degree or another to the regimes of the Bloc as a whole. Such "macrointerests" include the doctrinal disapproval of capitalism, democracy, and "degenerate" Western society in general; joint suspicion of Western intentions in Eastern Europe and the world at large; and, above all, a shared apprehension that they and their systems simply could not survive if Soviet support were withdrawn.

**Ideology.** As China and Yugoslavia have repeatedly made clear, a presumably common ideology can divide as well as unite. Indeed, unless orthodoxy is defined and imposed by some higher authority, ideological differences within the family become almost inevitable over time. Still, as the principal seat of Marxist-Leninist thought and as the Communist world's founding state, the USSR enjoys a certain ideological prestige and preeminence (though hardly as much as it claims). East Europeans who would contend with the USSR therefore must contemplate a charge of heresy as well as the usual secular forms of pressure. While this may not prove decisive, it is at least discouraging. More important, the CPSU's ideological credentials provide the Bloc with a common means of communication, give Moscow a pretext for an endless series of pronouncements about matters that otherwise would seem to impinge on the internal affairs of the East European (and other) states, lend authority to Soviet concepts of intra-Bloc affairs, and define the limits of the junior partners' relations with the infidels in the outside world. More subtly, ideology provides the same rationale to all the parties of the Bloc for their very existence; why a church without beliefs? This means, in turn, that these parties share a reluctance to tamper with doctrine, lest it—and their survival—be put at risk.

**Economic Ties.** The sheer volume of Soviet-East European economic intercourse assures the USSR of a powerful instrument of influence. Though gradually diminishing over the years, the percentage of East European trade with the Soviet Union remains high enough (imports ranging in 1981 from a low of 20 percent in the case of Romania to over 50 percent for Bulgaria, exports conforming to a similar pattern) to imply a substantial degree of economic dependence. This is especially so since an obvious alternative, greatly expanded trade with the West, is not as a practical matter available to the East Europeans, either now (in the wake of Poland's near financial collapse) or in the foreseeable future. The Soviets also appear to be the primary source of badly needed economic aid over the next few years, even though the level of such aid will almost certainly decline—and East European economies suffer as a consequence—as the USSR's own economic problems grow.

But while the USSR's economic ties to Eastern Europe are certainly useful in a variety of ways—they create tangible means of contact, can be employed as political weapons, and generally inhibit East European moves toward independence—they do not necessarily serve as a battery of heavy artillery when there are serious strains in a relationship. Thus, Soviet threats of economic retaliation and economic warfare have not always proved effective (for example, against Romania and Czechoslovakia in the 1960s). When they were actually carried out—against China in 1960 and against Yugoslavia, virtually sealed off from economic relations with the entire Bloc after 1948—they failed to produce either an economic collapse or a favorable change in political behavior. In any event the East European regimes retain some small economic leverage of their own, and they can argue that Soviet failure to provide adequate levels of assistance might jeopardize domestic tranquillity and their own authority.

**The Military Connection.** Nothing has testified to the efficacy of Soviet military power as a direct instrument of control quite so eloquently as the consequences of its removal from Yugoslavia, Romania,

**Confidential**

and, after a long delay, Czechoslovakia. The mistake of withdrawal is not likely to be repeated in the foreseeable future.

In addition to using occupying forces as a means of intimidation and a reminder of Soviet might, the USSR has insisted on maintaining close oversight of Bloc forces via the Warsaw Pact and indirectly controls many of their activities through mission assignments and training exercises. (Romania is a partial exception.) The purpose is fourfold: to forestall the use of East European armies in ways inimicable to Soviet interests; to augment Soviet forces in the event of war; to develop a cadre of pro-Soviet officers and a locus of pro-Soviet power which can be used not only against the population at large but also as a politically restraining force in the event that a local regime has embarked on a wayward course; and, in extremis, as recently demonstrated for the first time in Poland, to make political use of these forces when the existing regime is faltering or disloyal.

But here again, there are drawbacks and risks. In Romania, for example, the armed forces supported the regime's drive for independence; elements of the Hungarian army did the same in 1956, and *none* are thought to have sided with the Soviets; and the Polish Army in 1982 seems to have proved its loyalty to its own high command and the Jaruzelski regime but given no sign that it would help the Soviets in a contest between the two.

**Personal Contacts.** Very little is known about the quality and extent of the private, personal relationships between Soviet and East European leaders and other politicians and prominent administrators. Certainly they exist; sometimes signs of this are reflected in public statements, as when Gomulka, Kadar, Novotny, and others seemed to register some degree of personal dismay at the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964. But how much importance should be placed on specific attachments can only be conjectural.

At a lower level, however, there is some firsthand testimony which suggests that personal contacts between East European party *apparatchiki* and other bureaucrats with their Soviet opposite numbers are very widespread and probably of great importance to the Soviets as a continuing, low-key means of exerting

influence. Simple prudence apparently dictates that the East European official stay abreast of Soviet attitudes relevant to his own professional interests; similarly, concern over the security of his own position and eagerness for advancement would encourage that official to pay serious attention to Soviet advice, particularly if he suspects, as he should, that similar concerns prompt comparable behavior at higher levels within his own organization. While all this does not automatically ensure East European conformity and fidelity, and may at times help the East Europeans to exercise some influence on the Soviets, it must in general foster East European caution—not an unknown proclivity in bureaucracies anyhow—encourage the avoidance of disagreement, and promote a sort of miasmic susceptibility to Soviet guidance.

**The Soviet "Presence."** Finally, among the weapons of influence in the Soviet armory is something even more amorphous than personal contacts, the fact that the Soviets are simply but overwhelmingly *there* in Eastern Europe. To be sure, the effects of this, principally psychological, are negative as well as positive; "Russki Go Home" would adorn fully half the available walls of Eastern Europe were the youth of these countries as given to graffiti as their Western compatriots (and cans of spray paint equally available). And the collective sighs of relief in Yugoslavia, Romania, and China in the wake of massive withdrawals of Soviet military or "advisory" personnel were clearly audible throughout the world. But elsewhere the continuing Soviet presence can (though it not always does) produce a kind of ennui and resignation, a feeling of helplessness—why fight city hall?—in the face of such awesome odds.

#### **The East European Response**

While clearly effective as ways to influence East European development and constrain East European sovereignty, the instruments of persuasion, control, and intimidation outlined above by no means constitute a system of absolute authority. On the contrary, as history has demonstrated, the pattern that has emerged over the years since Stalin's death has done so in piecemeal fashion rather than as the result of some grand design, emphasizes in the main bilateral

**Confidential**

Confidential

rather than empirewide relationships, and lacks a consistent, cohesive set of rules and standards through which East European conduct can be filtered and against which East European behavior can be judged. The system, then, has many faults and is, in addition, relatively inchoate.

The East European states have had considerable experience in operating within imperial systems—most have enjoyed national independence only briefly in the modern era. There are similarities in the ways the individual regimes have dealt with the Soviets and the ways their non-Communist predecessors dealt with the Hapsburgs, Hohenzollerns, and Ottomans. Their behavior has been and is essentially opportunistic, running the gamut from bargaining over legalities to outright defiance:

- Low-key resistance to innovation and to "general orders" is perhaps the most frequent and telling form of negative East European response. It is easier and safer, for example, to drag one's feet than to flatly oppose; it is also easier to find collegial support for delaying tactics than for clear refusals, the former demanding subterfuge, the latter courage.
- Even the most adamant and heroic among East European Communist "rebels"—Tito and Nagy—did not initially seek to sever themselves and their countries from their Soviet association, and Dubcek never did. In the case of Nagy and Dubcek, both men earnestly sought compromise, not conflict, but both ultimately found themselves propelled by irresistible forces at work within their own societies.
- Even the most obsequious of East European satraps are capable of occasional obduracy. Thus, Polish leaders in the late 1940s, apparently fearing widespread rebellion, failed to collectivize agriculture on the scale demanded by Stalin; conservative regimes in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria only pretended to go along with Moscow's call for a "New Course" in the mid-1950s; and Ulbricht made known his severe reservations about Soviet policy toward West Germany in the late 1960s.

• In Hungary the Kadar leadership has chosen to follow an innovative course of its own, a novel and relaxed approach to domestic affairs, without great regard for fashions in vogue elsewhere in the Bloc. Assured of Kadar's basic loyalty, reassured by his regime's public devotion to Soviet foreign policies, and surely not anxious to risk renewed turbulence in a nation that has historically proved a reluctant client, the Soviets have apparently gone along with the experiment, though at times with hesitation and anxiety.

• Particularly risky, of course, has been the peculiar "independentist" Romanian way of Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu. This has involved the previously mentioned "Declaration of Independence" in 1964, unprecedented public references to unredeemed Romanian territory in the USSR, frank appeals to nationalist sentiments among the people at large, an informal (undeclared) political alliance with Yugoslavia potentially directed against the Soviet Union, and "vetoes" of Soviet initiatives concerning both CEMA and the Warsaw Pact. It has also involved criticism of Soviet ideological precepts designed to reinforce Soviet claims to hegemony and support of implicitly anti-Soviet "polycentrist" themes propounded by the Yugoslavs and Eurocommunists. All these moves and positions have been swallowed by the post-Stalin Soviet leaderships, which sometimes seem less tolerant than simply outplayed.

• Clearly however, there are limits to the game that both parties understand. First and most obvious is the Ceausescu regime's pledge not to abandon the Communist system at home (which is not something that regime would wish to do in any case) and not formally and completely to abandon the Soviet Bloc system abroad (which, though less clearly so, is also an event the regime would rather not undertake, even were it feasible). For its part, the Soviet leadership has not invaded—though it has certainly not foreseen the threat—nor, for roughly 20 years, has it sought actively to overthrow the obstreperous gang in Bucharest. Presumably, Moscow's reasoning is that a known thorn in the side is better than

Confidential

the unknowns and costs and hazards of seeking to remove it, particularly if that thorn happens to be, as it is, the poorest, most isolated geographically, and arguably the least important strategically of all the Bloc states.

The "final" options open to the East European states—rebellion and secession—seem less likely in this era of the Brezhnev Doctrine (and what it signifies) than in the 1950s and 1960s, precisely because the invasion threat is credible enough to make them seem "final." At the same time, however, because these options *remain* possible, the threat of either or both continues to concern the USSR and gives the East European regimes some room for maneuver.

Aside from these forms of resistance to Soviet control, the East European states exercise a kind of reverse influence on the Soviet Union that is hardly dramatic but that may help at least indirectly to curb Soviet hegemony.

#### **East European Influence on the USSR**

When the stakes are very high, most East European leaders are probably prepared to assert their own interests with vigor and conviction. Indeed, the regimes of all the East European states, even including those of the fiefdom of Bulgaria and of that curious contrivance of the Cold War, East Germany, see themselves as representatives of national entities with peculiar national interests. Each regime is capable of seeing problems in its own light, relatively free of the shadow of Soviet policy and doctrine. Thus it was that the dean of the faithful, Walter Ulbricht, fearing a threat to the national existence of the GDR, actively and effectively resisted trends in Soviet policy toward West Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s; thus it would be in Sofia, for roughly the same kinds of reasons, if the Soviets should ever side with Yugoslavia on the question of Macedonia.

The point is, not only do East European interests sometimes conflict with Soviet and sometimes cause trouble; the existence and expression of these interests also influences Soviet policy, helps to shape it, even puts limits on it. Indeed, this is one way the empire fights back.

The East Europeans, in addition, offer the Soviet body politic, not to mention its dissenters, a variety of alternatives—intellectual, cultural, and economic—which of course is one reason why the flow of East European ideas to the USSR is so severely restricted by the Soviet authorities. The East European leaders can also provide direct political support or opposition to one or another Soviet leader framing policies or seeking allies, though the East European role seems not to have been large during past periods of Soviet succession. And finally, Eastern Europe, as an area of potential turbulence, can help indirectly to shape Soviet politics and policies by remaining calm and acquiescent, or, conversely by becoming agitated and/or blowing up.

In the long run as the empire matures, the direct influence of the East European states on Soviet behavior and policy seems likely to increase. The Hungarian economic experiment was tolerated under Brezhnev and now seems likely to receive greater attention and approbation under Andropov. All the East European states have benefited from Romania's insistence on (and the USSR's recognition of) the right of members to assert independent views in Bloc councils. Moscow has demonstrated some willingness to give these states a greater voice in CEMA—though this is as much a pragmatic adjustment to economic realities as it is a capitulation to political pressure—and has paid at least some lipservice to the notion that they should play a larger decisionmaking role within the Warsaw Pact as well. The Soviets have also displayed a disposition to enhance the status of some East European leaders (Gomulka was the prime example of this), almost as if they were *ex officio* members of the Soviet elite.

While the Soviets may wish to view such adjustments as a sign of growing imperial cohesion—the East European members of the club are simply being given a vote—the end result could of course be quite different if one or another East European leader interprets them as an accommodation of his own growing autonomy.

25X1

Confidential

20

Confidential

## Successions and Their Impact

*The approaching succession [in the Soviet Union], whatever the form and results of its initial stage, will eventually involve a replacement in the top leadership and the central establishment on a scale much greater than the last two successions and will be combined with an increased generational turnover of the Soviet political elite. This . . . has no precedent in Soviet history. It will be a political development of long-term duration and significance.*

Seweryn Bialer

### The Andropov Succession

Signs that a post-Brezhnev struggle for leadership was under way in the Kremlin were visible in both the Soviet political arena and in the area of Soviet economic policy long before Brezhnev himself had succumbed to his final heart attack. Maneuvering among the possible heirs began in earnest in January 1982 when a key power broker, Mikhail Suslov, died and upset the existing balance.<sup>23</sup> Signs of this were quickly reflected in leadership appearances and appointments, and debates over longstanding issues of economic consequence, such as declining labor productivity, managerial responsibilities, and technological stagnation, soon thereafter surfaced in the Soviet press.<sup>24</sup>

That a struggle for Brezhnev's mantle, if at all protracted and deep, would have a profound impact in Eastern Europe, and in all probability on relations between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well, seems as close to an iron law of empire as one is likely to get. But there is no law, apparently, which decrees either the duration or intensity of succession infighting within the USSR. It took Khrushchev four turbulent years to succeed Stalin, Brezhnev six or eight years of subdued struggle to succeed Khrushchev. And it now seems possible, though by no means certain, that Andropov essentially accomplished the task in just nine or 10 months of relatively moderate contention.

Specifically, in terms of precedents, the succession to Khrushchev was far less disruptive and traumatic than the succession to Stalin. This was partly because the void left by Stalin's death was incomparably greater than the one opened up by Khrushchev's removal. Though "harebrained," Khrushchev's policies were far less damaging and posthumously controversial than Stalin's and required fewer immediate amendments (and no potentially explosive anti-Khrushchev secret speech). The general mood in the USSR in 1964 was calmer and much less anxiety ridden than the prevailing mood in 1953 (when the Soviet leaders actually feared for their skins). Further, Khrushchev's successors, unlike Stalin's, did not fall out immediately over the question of power, and they assured their constituencies that Khrushchev's excesses of style, his penchant for reorganizations and assigning economic priorities to pet industries, and his tamperings with the party machinery would cease once and for all.

The collective that succeeded Khrushchev and the Brezhnev regime that, in turn, succeeded the collective, shifted policy emphases and instituted new programs over time but in general established a pattern of leadership that sought a "return to normalcy" and the "pursuit of policies of institutional continuity, gradualism, accommodation, and reassurance of the elite, in short of stability."<sup>25</sup>

And all this seemed to argue "for the ability of the Soviet polity to achieve the [next] transfer of the top leadership position without major drama, without undue shock."<sup>26</sup>

The apparent success of Yuri Andropov in consolidating his authority—most obviously his authority over foreign policy—within hours of Brezhnev's death on 10 November did, in fact, suggest an orderly transfer of power. Andropov's success can probably be attributed to the lackluster character of his competitors, to

<sup>23</sup> Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors* (Cambridge and New York, 1980), pp. 73-75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

25X1

Confidential

his own superior talents and general resourcefulness, and to his ability to line up impressive support from colleagues in the Politburo and within key interest groups (surely including the KGB and probably the military).

Brezhnev's long illness may also have contributed indirectly to the overtly decorous succession process. There was time to make various political arrangements and alliances, time for at least the temporary resolution of some issues, and time for the various interest groups in Soviet society to be heard and to bring their influence to bear. And all this could take place while Brezhnev was still able to provide continuity and national leadership and the appearance of stability at the top.

This is not to say, however, that "it's all over but the shouting." Andropov seems to have won dominance very quickly and efficiently and with a minimum of political disruption. But this may in part merely have reflected the unanimous desire in the Politburo to avoid open signs of disunity in the leadership. And unless he has somehow already gained complete mastery over the Politburo and the Secretariat (something Brezhnev never did), the Soviet leadership will continue to function in part as an oligarchy. This means, *inter alia*, that disagreements over policy and resistance to Andropov's rule, though perhaps they will not be expressed dramatically, are likely to persist.<sup>27</sup>

In the area of policy, especially economic policy, Andropov has clearly indicated his desire for change. But—no doubt with a view to minimizing contention within the Politburo and uneasiness within the bureaucracy—he has also revealed a willingness to proceed with caution. Thus concerning (in his words) "the need to extend the independence" of various economic enterprises, his declaration of 22 November is a case in point: "It is necessary," Andropov told the Central Committee, "to conduct experiments if need be, to make appraisals, and to take account of the

<sup>27</sup> Grey Hodnett has observed that, even under Khrushchev at the height of his power, "one-man rule and collective leadership were both simultaneously part of Soviet political reality." Hodnett has also noted that one should distinguish between "resistance to the pretensions and policies of the incumbent leader and outright competition for his post." (Hodnett, "Succession Contingencies in the Soviet Union," *Problems of Communism*, vol. XXIV (March-April 1975), pp. 4-5.

experience of fraternal countries." This is interesting, even modestly titillating, but hardly a rousing call to action.

Beyond Andropov, who is 68, there is a good chance of far greater change. "This is the first time in Soviet history that an entire generation of leaders [not just the top leadership position] is departing history's stage more or less together. Accordingly, precedents are fragile and the uncertainties great."<sup>28</sup>

Further, quoting Seweryn Bialer:

*The departure of the Great Purge generation of leaders is in itself an important turning-point in Soviet political history. The circumstance, coinciding as it does with another turning-point in Soviet economic history, marks a time of unusual opportunities and openings for change. . . .*

*The Soviet system in the 1970s has displayed a high level of stability, continuity, and marginality of change. It is my contention that this . . . may be seriously shaken in the coming decade. . . . the Soviet Union [of the 1980s] may be significantly different from the Soviet Union of the 1970s. Of course I am not at all certain that major changes will take place. What I do project is a significant increase in pressures for change.<sup>29</sup>*

#### The New Generation of Soviet Leaders

Over time, perhaps in the middle or later years of this decade, a new contender for power in the CPSU will be cast up, probably a younger man, a representative of the post-Stalin generation, more vigorous and less committed to the mores and myths of the past. At the same time, there will be a comparable generational turnover in *all* the Soviet political elites. One particularly knowledgeable observer, Seweryn Bialer again, has studied this new generation and interviewed a

<sup>28</sup> Bialer, *op cit*, p. 300, 301.

25X1

Confidential

Confidential

variety of its members and has provided a good glimpse of what it may look like:

*One of its crucial formative political experiences . . . took place during the protracted ferment and shock of Khrushchev's anti-Stalin campaign . . . a campaign that questioned authority and established truths and thereby stimulated critical thought.*

*The new generation is clearly a Soviet generation in its typical and persistent adherence to the cult of the state. [Its members are committed to] the basic forms of Soviet political organization . . . [the] belief that the system is right and proper. . . [But] they tend to exhibit little of their predecessors' xenophobia and much less of their fear and deeply rooted suspicion of the outside world.*

*One most striking trait of this group is its skepticism about the grander claims of Soviet propaganda concerning the system's merits. Its members display both a well-developed awareness of the system's functional shortcomings . . . and [of] Soviet backwardness and provinciality in general. They do not disguise their dislike and lack of respect for the old generation . . . [This generation is also] grossly materialistic . . . [and] is characterized by highly developed career orientation . . . and elitism.*

*It is a generation that perceives the inability of the Brezhnev administration to lay out a direction for Soviet development . . . that is less likely to accept actual or potential international achievements as substitutes for internal development . . . that may be willing to pay a higher price in terms of political and social change if persuaded that such a price would assure substantial improvement in the growth and efficiency of the productive and distributive processes.<sup>30</sup>*

In short, as Bialer sees it, the post-Stalin generation of the politically elite is essentially pragmatic and forward looking, no less patriotic than its predecessors but certainly more realistic about the faults of the system and thus, in the Soviet context, basically reform minded. This does not mean, however, that the bulk of its members is likely to favor reforms of a truly liberal or democratic character, a la Dubcek, or to seek to emulate the barnstorming, highly ideological approach of Khrushchev. Nor, as Bialer notes, need it be "easier to deal with in the international arena"; on the contrary, it might be "less cautious, more prone to take risks" because it lacks firsthand experience with "the cost of building Soviet might" and is accustomed to the USSR's great power status.

One might add to this analysis the notion that there nonetheless is at least one characteristic the new age group shares with older generations, the natural political tendency to react against the excesses and failures of the preceding regime. Malenkov and Khrushchev sought to overcome the suffocating effects of years of Stalinist tyranny. Brezhnev and his associates in turn strove to eliminate the unsettling consequences of Khrushchev's flamboyant style and controversial policies. Andropov will try to get the USSR moving again, though without entirely casting off the caution of his predecessors. The next generation of leaders is likely to be reactive too, may discard the hardline wariness of Andropov, try to expand the number of permissible means to confront problems, and seek to enlarge and make more realistic the vision of what Soviet society should ultimately become.<sup>31</sup>

#### Pressing Policy Problems

Most authorities would probably agree that, given the seriousness and complexity of the problems confronting the new Soviet leadership, debates over policy are likely to be intense.<sup>32</sup> Such debates will surely involve

<sup>30</sup> The individual backgrounds and career paths of the members of the post-Stalin generation, revealed tentatively by Bialer's study of a limited sample (the Russian first provincial secretaries), also seem to suggest a less conservative overall approach, because members of this group tend to be of middleclass origin, are better educated, are technocrats as well as *apparatchiki*, come predominantly from urban areas, and—presumably in part because of their talents—have risen rapidly to their present positions.

25X1

<sup>30</sup> Bialer, op cit, pp. 103-107.

Confidential

questions concerning Soviet relations with the United States, China, and Eastern Europe, but the sharpest disagreements will probably focus on the USSR's economic problems.<sup>33</sup> There can be little doubt, in fact, that it is in this area that the Andropov leadership and its successors will face their most demanding task: coping with a variety of awesome problems that have for some time been neglected by a Brezhnev regime disposed to compromise, to gratify many (though not all) competing interest groups, and in general to muddle through, problems that cannot be solved, or even partially solved, by placebos and traditional methods.

*Past [economic] problems were concentrated either on one area at a time and/or were responsive to a mass mobilization effort, so to say, to the strategy of a hammer blow. The approaching problems of the 1980s are spread across the board to many vital areas and require sophisticated manipulation . . . the strategy of the scalpel.<sup>34</sup>*

Most pressing, of course, will be questions of resource allocation and the appropriate administrative-managerial-structural way to deal with them. Near stagnation of the growth of GNP, a looming energy crisis, impending labor shortages, persisting agricultural shortcomings, a possible decline in living standards, a general social malaise, the continuing growth of investment in the military sector, and declining investment elsewhere—all these problems and more are coming together to demand major, systemic changes imposed from above. They are doing so, moreover, during a period of political stress and at a time when it is becoming increasingly apparent that ideology and existing doctrines not only fail to offer a guide to prosperity but positively inhibit or even preclude progress toward that goal. Economic circumstances thus cry out for radical change, and Bialer, for one, suggests that, if Andropov does not or cannot respond effectively, the younger leaders probably will.

Bialer does not believe, however, that a radical solution to economic problems will carry with it the seeds

of a radical change in the political system. He thinks the regime will effectively guard against "dangerous fractures and ruptures" and that the system is sufficiently strong and stable to survive fundamental alterations in economic policy.<sup>35</sup> And yet, to be successful, a new economic program will have to deal with difficulties likely to reach crisis proportions by the middle of the decade and effect truly fundamental reforms. Further, anything this ambitious and far reaching would almost inevitably provoke high-level disagreements over the allocation of resources, even were resources in more plentiful supply than they will be. But Bialer seems to minimize the likelihood of a serious political struggle at the top.

Other experts, most notably Myron Rush, disagree in part. Rush, for example, foresees serious political contention over the direction of the economy; doubts that even radical reform, if agreed upon, would solve the economic problem; posits a possible weakening of the USSR's security position as a consequence; suggests that changes sufficient to turn the economy around would, in fact, endanger the system as a whole; and implies that because of this the effort is not likely to be made.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Rush believes that *if* fundamental reform is attempted, it is likely to be associated with a change in leadership. "Radical reform is most favored, not simply by succession . . . but rather by a succession consequent upon the manifest failure of a leadership and its policies."<sup>37</sup>

Both Rush and Bialer agree that the *need* for profound change exists now and will probably become particularly acute later in this decade. Further, Rush does not seem to dispute Bialer's characterization of the post-Stalin elite as, essentially, more open minded and activist than its predecessors. To the extent that these two observers disagree, then, the argument may eventually be settled if the new generation of Soviet leaders proceeds in a radical way to refashion the

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 67-68.

<sup>34</sup> Myron Rush, "The Soviet Military Build-Up and the Coming Succession," *International Security* (spring 1981), pp. 169-185.

<sup>37</sup> Rush, *How Communist States Change Their Rulers*, p. 239.

<sup>34</sup> Bialer, op cit, p. 291.

25X1

Confidential

**Confidential**

economy, believing *erroneously* that in the process no damage need be done the political superstructure. And in this way, the future leaders of the USSR could unwittingly become the architects of their own fall from power.

### The Impact on Eastern Europe

The nature of the attack on domestic problems in the USSR by post-Brezhnev leaderships will have major implications for Eastern Europe. A radical change in the administration of the Soviet economy, for example, would inspire motion toward similar reforms in other Bloc states. Outcomes would vary according to the degree of autonomy exercised by each party, the preferred policies of the individual leaderships, and the character and force of Soviet guidance. As during the New Course of the mid-1950s, however, the issue itself would become important simply because the USSR had raised it.

There are, in addition, rather more indirect forms of fallout from changes in Soviet positions. A shift in investment patterns, for example, might affect the composition of Soviet trade with Eastern Europe. A turn toward more provocative acts abroad might curtail East European trade with Western countries and further limit the availability of Western credits. And so on.

All of which might suggest that, because a succession period in the USSR inevitably involves questions of policy of interest to the East Europeans, it would behoove the leaders of these states to make their feelings known or, if less cautious, to actually try to involve themselves on one or another side of an issue or of a political struggle.<sup>38</sup>

As important as the precise nature of Soviet policies arising out of succession politics, and the degree of Bloc involvement, are the consequences in Eastern

<sup>38</sup> Whether this has happened in the past—for example, Nagy supporting Malenkov, the exponent of reform; Rakosi, siding with the then more conservative Khrushchev—is not so easy to determine. It would have been quite sensible under the circumstances, but it is hard to document, the initiative for the East Europeans' limited involvement probably lay with Moscow, and there is in any case reason to doubt that any East European leader enjoyed sufficient stature at that time to enter himself into the Soviet political arena. But this need not rule out interventions by East European leaders in the future.

Europe of disarray in the top Soviet leadership. Stability in the Soviet-East European relationship seems to be enhanced during periods of strong leadership or dictatorship in the Kremlin and weakened during periods of collective rule. The failure of a Soviet oligarchy to agree on a program, to provide clear and consistent direction, and to project an aura of certainty and unity had obvious, direct, and even dramatic effects in Eastern Europe during the brouhaha attending the Stalin succession. Though less apparent and direct, the impact of the succession to Khrushchev was almost equally dramatic, at least in Czechoslovakia.<sup>39</sup> (See the accompanying chart.)

To be sure, some of Moscow's troubles in Eastern Europe have arisen from its own deliberate decisions to diminish the worst forms of oppression and to allow greater autonomy, all in the name of ensuring a more effective hegemony. But this more enlightened approach sometimes had unintended results. Soviet reluctance to interfere in the domestic squabbles of the East European parties, for example, occasionally only exacerbated factionalism, weakened the existing leaderships, and encouraged other elements in society to play a political role. And many Soviet decisions affecting Eastern Europe were not clearly explained, consistently applied, or adequately backed up, partly

<sup>39</sup> This distinction between periods of oligarchic rule and one-man dictatorship is a useful and generally accurate one but can be misleading. All political conflict does not disappear from the Soviet scene simply because a single leading figure becomes dominant; Khrushchev faced one degree or another of resistance throughout his career at the top, and the men who surrounded him there represented institutional and political/economic interests that were at times hostile to Khrushchev's purposes. The same was true of Brezhnev, though, because he was less innovative and was more inclined to accommodate various interests than combat them, he had an easier time of it, politically, than his ousted predecessor. Still, major divisions and disagreements within the Politburo do not seem to be the norm during periods of personal dictatorship in part because one man can arbitrate disputes and demand conformity once a decision has been made. This is not the case during a succession struggle; there is no final referee, perhaps no one with enough assured power to clamp down on dissent once a decision has been made, and, indeed, even a strong possibility in some instances that no decision *can* be made. The differences between the two stages of leadership are thus by no means merely academic, and in terms of their impact, as in Eastern Europe, they may be much more important than their similarities.

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**A Chronology of Events in the USSR  
and Eastern Europe, 1953-81<sup>a</sup>**


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Events Affecting and Circumstances in the Soviet Politburo	Coincident and/or Related Developments in Eastern Europe	Events Affecting and Circumstances in the Soviet Politburo	Coincident and/or Related Developments in Eastern Europe
<b>1953</b> <b>Intense political struggle in the wake of Stalin's death.</b>	New Course declared. <b>Pilsen riots in Czechoslovakia.</b> <b>Insurrection in Berlin.</b>	<b>1964-68</b> <b>Khrushchev ouster (fall, 1964), low-key succession struggle, policy uncertainty.</b> Emergence of detente, reaction to <i>Ostpolitik</i> .	<b>Romania declares "independence" (spring 1964).</b> East European leaders unsettled by Khrushchev's removal. Attempted coup in Bulgaria.
<b>1954-55</b> <b>Malenkov-Khrushchev contest.</b> Malenkov loses but collectivity persists. Policy disputes. Rapprochement with Yugoslavia.	<b>Increasing autonomy and diversity.</b> Back-and-forth policies, some political shakeups, growing party factionalism in Poland and Hungary.	<b>1968</b> <b>Brezhnev seeks dominance.</b> Confused, initially divided reaction to Czech events, then invasion.	<b>Prague spring.</b>
<b>1956</b> <b>Disagreement and division in Politburo.</b> <b>Khrushchev's drive for power and accompanying anti-Stalin speech.</b>	Growing diversity and autonomy. <b>Polish October</b> , Gomulka becomes leader. <b>Hungarian revolution.</b>	<b>1969-early 1970s</b> <b>Brezhnev moves to consolidate power.</b> Detente flourishes.	<b>Major riots in Poland</b> (1970), Gomulka ousted, Soviets do not interfere.
<b>1957</b> <b>"Anti-Party Group" ousted.</b> Khrushchev dominant.	Modified New Course continues.	<b>1970s</b> Brezhnev clearly dominant. No policy surprises.	Era of relative tranquillity, contacts with West accelerate. Romania still disruptive.
<b>1958-62</b> Preoccupation with emerging Sino-Soviet dispute, Berlin crises. Berlin wall. Khrushchev maintains precarious supremacy.	Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania. <b>Albania defects.</b>	<b>1980-81</b> Brezhnev's health fading.	<b>Poland again: Solidarity.</b>
<b>1962</b> <b>Khrushchev weakened by Cuban fiasco.</b>	Romanian opposition to Soviet campaign to strengthen CEMA and Warsaw Pact.	<b>1982</b> January: succession struggle begins. November: Brezhnev dies, Andropov succeeds.	

<sup>a</sup> Periods of succession struggle in the USSR and major disruptive events in Eastern Europe are in dark type.

25X1

because of the uncertainty, anxiety, and division which dominated the deliberations of the Politburo for so long.

Andropov, described by his supporters as a man well equipped to deal with problems intelligently, is presumably eager to avoid any display of Politburo indecision and confusion and, indeed, to date has acted very much as the man in charge. And if the

Andropov regime is now able, in fact, to provide the East European leaderships with clear, firm, and consistent guidance, some of the tribulations characteristic of the past succession periods can no doubt be avoided. Andropov, for example, unlike Khrushchev vis-a-vis Rakosi and Hungary in 1955, will probably

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not find himself in the position of favoring one East European contender for power over another because of his own needs and policy positions within the Soviet Politburo. And, unlike Brezhnev, who could neither support nor denounce Novotny in Czechoslovakia in late 1967, Andropov does not seem the sort of man who would risk political disruptions for the sake of a putative neutralism (or simply because he was unable to make up his mind).

Still, many of the basic problems unsuccessfully faced by Khrushchev and Brezhnev continue to exist, and, as Andropov will soon find out, some are becoming more acute and the potential burdens all the larger. Specifically in the economic area: "The Soviet Union is running out of incentives for enticing, rather than compelling, allegiance from its East European allied elites. This allegiance is undermined by mounting evidence of the lack of Soviet economic muscle and the growing certainty that the Soviet Union is no longer able to make good on its economic commitments."<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand while the level of Soviet aid will probably level off or decline, overall East European economic reliance on the Soviet Union as a trading partner may not, and—depending in part on the policies of the West—could even increase, particularly in the vital area of energy imports. Soviet economic leverage is thus likely at least to be maintained, and under Andropov perhaps increased, though a tougher Soviet bargaining stance, greater emphasis on Bloc integration through CEMA, and diminished Soviet generosity in general are not likely to win much East European good will.

A major decline of Soviet economic support would in any event leave the East European leaders with four options, all of which involve uncertainties, costs, and dangers: (1) an effort to muddle through; (2) austerity, coupled with a more draconian domestic political program; (3) a thoroughgoing economic overhaul designed to bolster productivity and rationalize management through a turn toward market socialism or through administrative devolution; or (4) a further shift toward the West for aid and trade. The first would only postpone the day of reckoning; the second

would risk strong popular discontent, strikes, the formation of nonparty power blocs, and so forth; the third would be ideologically controversial, probably breed party factionalism, and be for a time bureaucratically and economically disruptive; and the fourth, if feasible at all, would bring with it such hazards as the unsettling growth of political and cultural ties with, and possible economic dependence on, the West and might in addition incur Soviet wrath.

Should it persist, indecision or excessive caution on the part of the Soviets about the direction of their own troubled economy would no doubt be accompanied by indecision concerning East European economic problems and policies as well. In this case the East European leaders would find themselves pretty much on their own.

These leaders must be better Kremlinologists than the Western practitioners of the craft—better able to decipher the esoteric communications of political combatants in the Soviet Union—and they surely have, in addition, far richer sources of hard information than even the most enterprising of Western observers. Thus, if Andropov largely succeeds in imposing his will and his policies on the Soviet Politburo, the East Europeans would be among the first to know and to react. But if Andropov is not able to assert or sustain clear dominance or supremacy, the prudent East European leader would try to hunker down and avoid decisions. He would be subject, however, to strong pressures from within his own constituencies and face discrete problems within his own society, and he could ill afford to remain inactive for very long. While he might not actively seek greater autonomy, he might in effect be forced to exercise it. At the same time elsewhere, a less prudent neighbor might provide an unsettling example by coveting more independence and moving quickly to exploit the general confusion in Moscow.

True, even if not effectively dominated by one man, the immediate post-Brezhnev leadership *could* survive without facing crises in Eastern Europe comparable to those of the past. But if so, they will only pass problems on to *their* successors who, if they are the

<sup>40</sup> Bialer, op. cit., p. 251.

Confidential

sort of men Bialer describes, will be much more likely to confront them head on, perhaps as a part of the larger question of what to do about Soviet problems in general. But whatever general course of action they adopt, hardline or soft, there can be no guarantee of peace and quiet in an area so inherently volatile as Eastern Europe.

#### **Succession in Eastern Europe**

All but one of the top Communist leaders in the Bloc states of Eastern Europe are well into their sixties and most of them are in or approaching their seventies. Chances are good, therefore, that the composition of one or more of these regimes will turn over in the fairly near future. Since none of the current East European leaders has designated an heir, and since, as in the CPSU, none of these parties has established a clear-cut means of succession, the maneuvering and infighting characteristic of at least past Soviet periods of succession may sooner or later be duplicated elsewhere in the Bloc.

The level of stability maintained in Eastern Europe during the 1970s, and still generally maintained in the 1980s except in Poland, could thus come to an end. Years of frustration and discontent could percolate to the surface, to be addressed by contenders-to-power who would seek to suppress it or, alternatively, try to turn it to their own political advantage.

Succession problems may be particularly acute in *Hungary* and *Romania*, though for quite different reasons. The former has for some time been in the vanguard of reform. This means, among other things, that disgruntled elements in the party will likely see Kadar's demise as an opportunity to regain power and alter policy. Hardline conservatives will probably not be able to make a comeback, but moderate conservatives—those who favor retrenchment rather than a neo-Stalinist revival—are still influential and are well aware that "Kadarism," a sort of national consensus based on compromise, has yet to be institutionalized. They will be bitterly opposed, however, by reformist components of the body politic, and if the struggle is at all prolonged, also by elements of the population at large, many of which hold a strong stake in the

survival of Kadar's "progressive" policies. The latter development would especially alarm the Soviets, who would in any case be concerned about the possibility of a post-Kadar "revisionist" drift in Hungarian policies.

Ceausescu in *Romania* was the designated heir of his predecessor, Gheorge Gheorgiu Dej, who was the figure initially responsible for the country's taking a singular road to independence within the Bloc. Ceausescu has maintained this aspect of Gheorgiu Dej's course, which is overwhelmingly supported by the Romanian people, but has otherwise lost popular support because of his insistence on his own absolute authority, his refusal to significantly moderate old-fashioned, semi-Stalinist economic policies (which emphasize heavy industry at the expense of agriculture and the consumer) and, in general, his harsh and arbitrary style of leadership, complete with his own "cult of personality." Not far away, surely, is the point where the political capital accumulated by Ceausescu through his defense of independence and his baiting of the Soviets is exhausted by his oppressive disregard of public welfare.

Whether he is removed by his colleagues in a palace coup or dies in office, Ceausescu's political demise may set off a chain of reactions comparable in intensity, if not scope, to the one in the USSR that followed the death of a man he resembles in a small way, Stalin; that is, a sharp struggle within the party over both succession and policy. Factions might fight over the most effective ways to appease the population at large, and one or another element might seek Soviet support, especially promises of sorely needed economic aid.

Assuming a strong leadership in Moscow willing to intervene, the Soviet role in a struggle to succeed Todor Zhivkov in *Bulgaria* would probably be decisive. But if the Soviets do not impose a solution, it is by no means inconceivable that Bulgaria too could undergo a major succession crisis in the wake of Zhivkov's death. The placidity of the current scene in

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Sofia, imposed (and occasionally accommodated) by Zhivkov, no doubt hides a simmering Balkan stew of diverse attitudes and aspirations. Indeed, from the end of the war until the early 1960s, when Zhivkov won a clear ascendancy over his rivals, high-level infighting was a more or less constant feature of Bulgarian political life.<sup>41</sup> And there are a number of forces and factors at work beneath the surface today that suggest the reemergence of political strife in the post-Zhivkov period.

Nationalism, directed in the main against Yugoslavia and Greece but occasionally anti-Soviet in the past, is one of those forces. It has manifested itself dramatically in the past in the form of a failed (mostly) military coup against Zhivkov in 1965, and is visible today in the regime's jingoistic attitudes toward the Macedonian question. The largely frustrated desire for a thoroughgoing modernization and reform of the Bulgarian economy—said by one Western observer to be characterized by its dependence on wood-burning computers—is another ingredient, one with strong political overtones that could become quite visible and controversial in the post-Zhivkov era. Finally, and related to this, Zhivkov has brought into positions of influence in the party and government a group of young, well-trained leaders who have been responsible for the limited reform programs introduced in Bulgaria to date; these men will wish to jockey for position in any post-Zhivkov regime and may push hard—and against stalwart conservative opposition—for further, more basic changes in the administration and structure of the economy.

Also of possible future consequence are Bulgaria's relative geographic isolation—it is the only Bloc state (save East Germany) that does not share a border with the USSR—and, in common with Romania, its unique good fortune in avoiding permanent Soviet military occupation. These circumstances would make any Soviet invasion especially difficult to mount and sustain, partly because the only land bridge from the

<sup>41</sup> Sometimes this infighting took bizarre forms. Thus Vulko Chervenkov, one of the triumvirate then in charge, actually advocated a "great leap forward" for Bulgaria in 1958, at a time when strains in Sino-Soviet relations had already become quite apparent.

Soviet Union to Bulgaria crosses unfriendly Romania, and they might encourage the Bulgarians—not the least resolute of peoples—to oppose with force.<sup>42</sup>

For the most part, the people of *Czechoslovakia* appear to have retreated into tight little individual shells, seeking through the satisfaction of personal desires some recompense for the pain of 1968 and some relief from the grayness of life in general. Further, most former officials of the Dubcek interregnum have been exiled or forced into menial labor and are in no position (or mood) to challenge the existing regime.

Still, factionalism within the depleted party remains surprisingly strong and, concerning economic reform, appears to be heating up. Husak's role as a referee between contesting factions, reinforced over the years by close ties to Brezhnev, no longer seems quite so effective, perhaps because of political and policy uncertainties generated in part by the succession maneuvering taking place in Moscow before Brezhnev's death. Indeed, signs in Prague of high-level disagreements over the kinds of economic reform needed—minimal or moderate—may have reflected different signals from the various contenders for leadership in Moscow. Should disputes within the Czechoslovak party widen—in spite of probable efforts by Andropov to curtail them—and perhaps eventually cost Husak his job, the struggle to replace him (and his cautious policies) could become quite intense.

The two remaining Bloc states, the GDR and Poland, seem somewhat less likely to suffer disruptive succession struggles than their southern neighbors. The

<sup>42</sup> A word here about two Balkan states, former members of the Bloc, that do not fall within the purview of this paper. Though currently unsettled, Yugoslavia has an established means of succession and is, in any case, both as a society and a system too far removed from Soviet politics to be much affected by the Soviet succession. Stalinist Albania, the most backward of all European countries—once aptly described as a kind of "North Korea without frills"—is also not likely to be a victim of Kremlin succession politics, though the demise of longtime party leader Enver Hoxha could in itself set off a series of violent political shocks.

Confidential

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party in East Germany is old and smug; in Poland it is old, discredited, cynical, and, in effect, out of power. Further, the Soviets were heavily involved in naming the leaders of both states, maintain a strong political and military presence in each, and are generally more concerned about stability in this vital area than to the south. The leaders of these two states, moreover, have not been in power as long as their confreres elsewhere.

Honecker in *East Germany* has kept a firm hand on his party and his regime and does not seem to be plagued by serious disagreements and divisions—testimony to his skill and, until recently, to East German economic successes. The most serious potential threat to Honecker's position and to party control might come not from within but rather, from without, from the USSR itself if, under a new leadership, it should one day shift toward greater accommodation of West German policies and aspirations. For East German Communists such a turn would carry with it the specter of reunification which, should it materialize, would in all likelihood extinguish the regime and all its works, the GDR included. (For this and other reasons, the Soviets are, of course, not likely to make such a move, but much to Pankow's consternation, they have flirted with the idea in the past, and they no doubt—in the event some very large gain in Western Europe seemed attainable—have kept the option open.)

Jaruzelski in *Poland* faces the most sorely troubled of all East European societies; the vast majority of the people are in various states of repressed opposition,

the party is weak and factionalized and no longer rules; and the economy is desperately ill. Jaruzelski's troubled tenure seems likely to endure for some time, however, because he controls the Army and there seems now to be no alternative—other than anarchy or Soviet invasion—to his martial law regime.

The USSR will of course seek to dominate the course of succession events in all these countries. But its ability to do so, short of military intervention, will be circumscribed in most instances—Bulgaria, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia are possible partial exceptions—by the autonomy (or semiautonomy) of the individual parties where the struggles will take place. As Andropov well knows, Soviet assets certainly exist in these parties, but, as he should also know, their depth and reliability, especially during periods of crisis, is open to serious question. So too is Moscow's ability through political action to arrest, much less reverse, the course of parties bent on defiance; past attempts to unseat unruly leaders through Soviet-sponsored coups (in Belgrade, Tirana, and Bucharest), for example, have all failed.

25X1

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## The Future in Eastern Europe

*If the combination of the economic emergencies facing the Soviet Union and its empire in the 1980s, together with the openings afforded by the approaching successions of leaderships and elites, do not yield serious efforts to reform the traditional system, then I do not know what may and will.*

*Seweryn Bialer  
(Paraphrase of a commentary, 1980) <sup>14</sup>*

### Forces at Work

For the past 30 years or so, the vast diversity of peoples and cultures that has evolved over the centuries in Eastern Europe has been reemerging, by fits and starts, two thrusts up, one down, but with a kind of implacable force. History, it may be said, is reasserting itself, not in any predetermined or "scientific" Marxist way, but with a will that the Soviets, so far, have been able to check but not eliminate.

There is even some (perhaps superficial) historical consistency in the kinds of regimes these states currently put up with. Thus, beginning in the south, Bulgaria's Zhivkov reigns as a kind of no-nonsense monarch, which is in the national tradition; Ceausescu in Romania resembles nothing so much as another fascist dictator, and there is certainly precedent for that; Kadar in Hungary governs as a relatively benevolent regent, a la Admiral Horthy between the wars; Husak in Czechoslovakia is an exception, but had the Russians not intervened, Dubcek (or his successors) would today rule in the manner of past democratic presidents; Honecker in the GDR asserts the kind of strong, personal authority which, if not exactly Hitlerian, is familiar to observers of the German scene; and General Jaruzelski in Poland repeats the Pilsudski pattern of exercising power as a military dictator.

Reduced to their essentials, the broad forces at work in Eastern Europe—each of which conspires in its own way and to one degree or another to diminish imperial cohesion—may be listed as follows:

- Strong nationalism throughout the area.

- The decline of Communist ideology, both as a guide to behavior and policy and as a common bond.
- The fragmentation of the Communist world and the establishment of competitive Communist centers of thought and power.
- The attenuation of some Soviet instruments of influence and control.
- The limited but meaningful autonomy of individual parties and regimes.
- The emergence of a new, post-Stalin elite, less revolutionary in outlook than its predecessors.
- Popular discontent with depressed living standards, with Communism as a political and economic system, and with the USSR as the sponsor and perpetrator of this system.
- Recurrent disarray and factionalism in the ruling parties (and especially during periods of succession in the Soviet party as well).
- The persistent allure of the West.
- The slowing down, stagnation, or decline of the various economies; the technological backwardness of these economies; and the gulf between these economies and those of the West.

Perhaps the greatest of these forces at the moment is the last, the state of the East European economies, parlous in some countries and nowhere flourishing. Recent rates of growth of GNP have been as follows:

	Average annual rate of growth (percent)		
	1966-70	1976	1981
Bulgaria	5.0	4.7	2.5
Czechoslovakia	3.4	1.7	-1.0
East Germany	3.5	2.0	1.5
Hungary	3.0	0.3	0.5
Poland	4.0	2.5	-6.6
Romania	4.9	10.9	1.0

The USSR as a source of relief is necessary but clearly deficient, given the size of its own economic problems. The West, greatly concerned about possible defaults as dramatized by Poland, is no longer a fount of credit. A possible, perhaps the only, long-term

<sup>14</sup> Bialer's remarks (*ibid.*, p. 305) are addressed to Soviet problems; they have been extended here to apply to the empire as a whole.

Confidential

solution, the institution of more or less radical reforms, would entail short-term economic burdens and long-term political costs (principally associated with the role and power of the party machines) and would not in any event carry with it a guarantee of success. Partly because of these political costs, the fear that basic economic changes would lead to purely national (vice Bloc and Socialist) lines of development and perhaps disagreements within the leadership, the Soviet regime has in the past been loath to encourage any widespread movement toward genuine, systemic reform in Eastern Europe.

Deepening economic stress in Eastern Europe combines with forces of social and political decay to create a setting poor in favorable omens but rich in uncertainties. None of the East European regimes enjoys positive popular support. Rather each counts on a form of popular sufferance, itself the product of fear—fear of harassment, job loss, imprisonment—and hope—hope that, as promised by the governments, living standards will improve. Now that prospects for the latter are waning, the public's stake in stability is too. Thus, the regimes may consider placing more and more reliance on fear, which may or may not work and which is, in any case, economically debilitating, or they may eventually succumb to pressures for radical economic reform.

How, and how well, the Soviets address these kinds of problems in the years ahead could make the difference between tension and turmoil, between the kind of strained stability now evident in most of the empire and a level of disarray and disorder comparable to or even greater than that of the past.

#### A Modest New Soviet Approach

Clearly, except in its ability to build up the USSR's military power, the Brezhnev regime deserved no applause for its performance in recent years. It was much better at postponing problems than solving them, and it was preservationist in outlook rather than innovative. Thus, in Eastern Europe while—thanks largely to Khrushchev—the Stalinist song has ended, the melody lingers on, a jarring reminder of past injustices and present inequities. What is needed is a different score and perhaps, eventually, an entirely new composition.

A truly new Soviet regime, heavily dominated by one man, would be in a better position to innovate if, of course, that man were so disposed. To be sure, some circumstances (including the USSR's own economic weaknesses), self-imposed limitations (including the Soviet leader's likely determination to preserve basic hegemony), and political realities in Eastern Europe (including the persistence of national differences) would constrain any movement toward change. But, in view of the size and scope of the USSR's problems in Eastern Europe, the failure of past Soviet leaderships to deal with them successfully, and the general bankruptcy of current Soviet policies and ideas vis-a-vis the area, the need for something much better will be obvious and, for a new leader of Andropov's apparent mien, perhaps compelling.

A new, more flexible program designed to correct the shortcomings of the past might focus initially on two seemingly contradictory objectives: the enhancement of essential Soviet controls and the enrichment of East European autonomy. Seeking to achieve the first might involve an effort to weave the diverse elements of Soviet dominion into a clearly defined, more coherent, and elastic whole; the second might seek to specify and expand the areas in which the East European leaders would be free to pursue policies of their own devising, appropriate to their own peculiar national circumstances. While ideology would at the same time be intended to serve as a common bond and as a very general guide to action, its proscriptive role could be greatly relaxed so that innovations (especially economic innovations) would not automatically be condemned as heresies.

The Warsaw Pact and CEMA would not be ignored in the process. On the contrary, each would be strengthened, partly as a means to ensure Soviet military and economic predominance, but also in an attempt to further rationalize command structure and various economic endeavors. The influence of the East Europeans in both organizations could nevertheless be allowed to grow without necessarily endangering the interests of the largest and most senior partner.

Confidential

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Especially if the stories about Andropov's support of extensive economic reform there are true—and some high-level Hungarians have privately said they are—contemporary Hungary might serve as a sort of base model for a new Soviet approach to Eastern Europe's endemic instability. Kadar's singular willingness to suspend political warfare with the bulk of the population—he long ago revised the old adage, "he who is not with us is against us" into "he who is not against us is with us"—his urge to replace anachronistic and inefficient economic practices and to allow market forces to play a role, and his apparent ability to run his own party in pretty much his own way may all be endorsed by Andropov because they *work*, that is, they have contributed to the stability of Hungarian society and the relatively good prospects of Hungarian socialism.

Even if not prompted by Andropov, some of the other East European regimes might be attracted by features of the Hungarian experiment, particularly by Kadar's apparent ability to cope reasonably well with economic problems in new ways without endangering fundamental party power or arousing public opposition in the process.<sup>44</sup>

But there would be no real need for Soviet interference in a program of this character so long as it did not threaten to get out of hand and so long as Moscow itself did not provoke arguments over the purity of ideology and fidelity to the "socialist system." Indeed, assuming that the parties concerned retained ultimate decisionmaking authority over national life and raised no direct challenges to the USSR's influence over their foreign policies, Soviet interests could be well served by Hungarian-style experiments that promised to alleviate both economic distress and political unrest—better prosperous and stable client states than poor, volatile protectorates.

<sup>44</sup> Hungary's current problems, including a stagnant rate of growth, may have dimmed its luster somewhat. But there are mitigating circumstances: (1) a large proportion of its GNP is in foreign trade and thus Hungary is more vulnerable than most to the effects of worldwide recession and, by the same token, more likely to profit (through its export trade) from the recovery; (2) Budapest seems to have anticipated and planned for its current economic troubles better than the other East European capitals and thus has been able to sustain a relatively high standard of living; and (3) political stability and previous economic successes have encouraged the Kadar regime not to retreat from its rational, reformist course, which promises benefits over the long term.

It does not, in fact, strain credulity to envision the eventual development of something on this order—what else is likely to be as effective? But, in practice, more than a few Soviets and East Europeans would find aspects of any such new course ideologically repellent, bureaucratically disruptive, politically risky, and economically uncertain. Accordingly, East European experimenters, even if given a green light by Andropov, are likely to find the going precarious. Even should major reforms be adopted and prove reasonably successful, the sources of much of the East European malaise—nationalism and popular political frustration—would remain beneath the surface, ready to emerge at the first sign that the program or the regime was faltering.

### The Commonwealth

With or without a new approach along the lines described above, the Soviets—the Andropov regime or its successors—will still have the option of pursuing Khrushchev's concept of a commonwealth of countries in which, ideally, the USSR would be the first-among-equals leader of a harmonious association of like-minded "socialist" states. Though the term itself—Socialist Commonwealth of Nations—is no longer used and was never well defined, the idea is still alive and has in some ways been expressed in practice. The Soviets' conditional legitimization of "separate roads to socialism" and "polycentrism" in the mid-1950s is a case in point. So too were the only partly successful Soviet rapprochements with Yugoslavia during the same period; Tito was in effect offered renewed membership in a Soviet camp reconstituted along commonwealth lines. Even the military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 could be said to conform to the commonwealth idea in the sense that it was a joint Soviet-East European undertaking against something construed as a common threat.

In operation the concept is a two-edged doctrinal sword: it endorses a form of independence for the East European states but at the same time sanctions direct (commonwealth) interference in their affairs when "socialism" is said to be threatened. But for the

Confidential

Soviets, the concept initially offered more form than substance; Khrushchev, in fact, was probably seeking in the main to provide appropriate ideological clothing for Soviet policy as it had actually evolved in the post-Stalin years.

All the same the notion of independence cum core-sponsibility does offer the East European regimes an alternative, on the one hand, to the perpetuation of their subordinate status and, on the other, to secession from the Bloc. Among other things, it promises a more meaningful form of partnership status to the Bloc states; that is, a real voice in commonwealth affairs and, in effect and ironically, a means to participate in the exercise of Soviet hegemony.

Such a partnership might appeal to East European Communists who seek more autonomy but who (justifiably) fear that their own parties could not survive without strong ties to the USSR and the Bloc as a whole. The arrangement, however, would do little to appease those in the East European elites who are nationalists and who favor complete sovereignty and/or a significant liberalization of their own political-economic systems. Nor, for the same reasons, would it be likely to ease popular discontent significantly.

The Soviet leaders would also have qualms about granting the East Europeans a larger voice in Bloc and, at least indirectly, Soviet affairs. How effective would a multinational Bloc board of directors be? Would each member be granted the right of veto (as in CEMA)? How could serious disagreements among members and even multistate alignments be prevented? And, finally, for Moscow, the ultimate question is: if the empire is ultimately transformed into something resembling an alliance, how could the Soviets maintain the strong degree of dominance they believe vital to their own interests?

#### A Radical Alternative

But whatever their interim approach, the Soviets will find the solution to their problems with the maintenance of hegemony in Eastern Europe on the day they cease to exercise it. Although there are no signs that the Soviet leadership under Andropov entertains any thoughts of surrendering or severely curtailing that hegemony, such a course of action, while doubtful, is

conceivable in the post-Andropov future. Indeed, a number of arguments can be made for it:

- Sooner or later it may occur to one or another Soviet leader—perhaps one seeking a venturesome new program with which to advance his own career—that there is no necessary heresy in advocating a clear-cut liberal change in Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe: a significant diminution of Soviet dominance; an accompanying increase in Soviet tolerance of diverse routes to “socialism”; and a relaxation of the standards that define the achievement of that exalted status.
- Though ideology implies a commitment to an ever-expanding “socialist world,” there is nothing in the evolving body of Marxist-Leninist thought that suggests that the USSR must maintain tight control of Eastern Europe. The Brezhnev Doctrine, qua doctrine (rather than as merely a rationale for past Soviet invasions and a pretext for future ones), does not provide theoretical justification for Soviet overlordship. Nor, any longer, does the concept of “proletarian internationalism,” which is in any case more a slogan than a theory.<sup>45</sup> Lenin himself, writing in the 1920s about the union of nations in the USSR, insisted (though no doubt disingenuously) on “absolutely voluntary consent” and “a union which *precludes any coercion* of one nation by another.”<sup>46</sup> And the implications of relevant ideological concepts, such as the ultimate disappearance of national boundaries, scarcely suggest a rationale or need for Soviet hegemony.
- Deviations from Soviet foreign policies, so apparent in Romanian positions, do not necessarily harm the USSR, except insofar as Moscow insists that consistent and total unity is essential to the cause. Even Yugoslav foreign policy, when not addressed to Bloc problems, frequently coincides, or at least does not conflict, with Soviet views.

<sup>45</sup> In fact: “ . . . there exists no formal theory of association in the world Communist system. . . . Proletarian internationalism is, *at best*, two rival conceptual frameworks [Soviet and Chinese] . . . ; *at worse*, it is several hortatory speculations, unverified, imprecise, and unsystematic.” Jan F. Triska, “The World Communist System,” in Triska, ed., *Communist Party States* (Indianapolis, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> As quoted by Triska, *ibid.*, p. 17.

Confidential

Confidential

- Complete international ideological harmony, while desirable, need not be vital. A prime requirement, the legitimacy of party rule, can be maintained without it (or, conversely, can be lost even with it). And Moscow's insistence on the universal validity of its own doctrinal views has: (1) not worked, (2) produced serious splits in the movement, and (3) led to the creation of rival centers of thought.
- The USSR's national self-esteem would no doubt be damaged by a withdrawal from its Western marches, especially if it appeared to be forced. On the other hand, its international prestige, especially in Western Europe, would surely be enhanced.
- The USSR's presence in Eastern Europe is imperial in nature because it rests ultimately on force. Clearly, the Soviet leaders would prefer a less burdensome and more effective arrangement, perhaps along the commonwealth lines discussed above. But, if they wish to establish something of this nature that is truly voluntary—and thus truly effective—they may finally realize that historical precedence is against them; the number of confederations more or less voluntarily entered into in the past is very small (only Switzerland, the United States, Italy, and perhaps Germany come to mind), and the elements which in those few cases permitted a free amalgamation simply are not present in the case of the USSR and Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup> Recognition of this verity, if it comes, would of course imply the need for change, either the attempted restoration of something akin to Stalinist terror or, conversely, an honest try for something quite new, perhaps the Finlandization of Eastern Europe.

<sup>47</sup> Karl W. Deutsch and others have identified eight of these prerequisites for voluntary confederation or integration, the first four of them said to be necessary, the last four desirable. Very much condensed, these are: (1) a real compatibility of values, a "we-feeling"; (2) the decline of differences which reinforce boundaries between states and the emergence of issues which cut across these boundaries; (3) the rise of a "core area" (in the case of Germany, the North German Confederation) which undergoes rapid economic growth; (4) wide areas of reciprocal communication and transactions, the broadening of elites, mobility, and links of social communication; (5) increasing reluctance to wage war among the states concerned; (6) some ethnic and linguistic assimilation; (7) strong economic ties; and (8) a commonly perceived outside military threat. See Triska, op. cit., pp. xxii.

While these arguments may, in the aggregate, make a conjectural case for a radical change in Soviet perceptions, they are of course theoretical in origin and may be, lamentably, so general in nature that they defy specific application. Even should one or another Soviet leader come to ponder similar propositions and problems, any urge he might feel to seek radical solutions will encounter strong contrary pressures arising from, *inter alia*, the inertia of the system, the resistance of interest groups, and the risks of change.

Inertia might prove to be the mightiest of these. The old ways of doing things have a powerful appeal to party, state, and military officeholders, as Khrushchev belatedly discovered. Change, especially experimental change, conjures up images of controversy, uncertainty, danger, and, not least, career wreckage.

There are, in fact, influential interest groups in Soviet society that would seek to block any proposed grant of greater sovereignty to Eastern Europe. The military, for one, would foresee and fear a concomitant withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Eastern Europe—and thus damage to Soviet security—the abandonment of its controls over armies it had helped to create, and the dissolution of an alliance structure (the Warsaw Pact) it has nourished and dominated from birth. Also unsettled would be CEMA bureaucrats, workers in foreign trade ministries, Central Committee *apparatchiki* and ideologists, managers of many export industries (who consider Eastern Europe a kind of captive market), managers of armaments factories, officers of the KGB with ties to satellite services, and, indeed, Soviet (and Russian) jingoists at large.

Any substantial loosening of Soviet authority in Eastern Europe would also incur major risks. Bloc leaders might try to convert a grant of greater autonomy into an exit visa; elements of the population in one or another Bloc country might take advantage of any relaxation of domestic controls to move into open and active opposition to the regime; workers might be encouraged by economic and administrative reform to

Confidential

seek self-management and freedom from party controls; and so forth. All of these things, in fact, have happened in the past.

The biggest risk for the Soviets thus could be—and they would surely be aware of this—that fundamental changes in the relationship decreed by the USSR itself might create precisely those circumstances—instability in Eastern Europe and, in the face of it, relative impotence in the USSR—that they were intended to avoid. In truth, volatile Eastern Europe even freed of Soviet dominance would not spontaneously convert to stability.

Other significant considerations might also complicate or deter any Soviet urge to shift positions. Foreign objectives, in particular the USSR's desire to expand its influence and ultimately to extend its hegemony into Western Europe, might decree the need for the preservation of its dominant influence in "springboard" Eastern Europe. So too might the USSR's longstanding concern over the German question and its fear that this might one day be resolved without Soviet participation and in a manner damaging to Soviet interests. Economic conditions will affect Soviet calculations, though continuing troubles in East European economies might pull the Soviets in opposite directions: toward a de facto loosening of influence, a casting adrift occasioned by the USSR's reluctance or inability to provide needed assistance (not to mention inspiration); or toward tighter controls, prompted by the demands of austerity and adversity and, perhaps, even a lingering hope that the East European economies will somehow recover their health and once more constitute a net asset for the USSR.

The arguments for a deliberate and significant loosening of Soviet ties to Eastern Europe are not, in fact, persuasive. History does not record many instances of a voluntary surrender of imperial power. Even in this century, the British and French, for example, did not spontaneously and altruistically decree freedom for their empires; rather they were victims of their own postwar weaknesses at home and of accelerating pressures and costs abroad.

Much more likely than an enlightened, self-generated movement toward a breakup of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe would be one permitted by circumstances in Moscow (that is, a change in the character and perspectives of the leadership analogous, say, to that in Paris following de Gaulle's coming to power in 1958) and forced by the national aspirations and courses of policy of the East Europeans themselves (imperfectly analogous to the revolution in Algeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s).

#### **The Lethal Option: Soviet Military Intervention**

Whether the Soviets will intervene militarily in one or another East European crisis is, ultimately, the essential question. Surprisingly, it is also a question that cannot be answered in absolute terms. Past interventions have demonstrated the Kremlin's willingness to move militarily but have also revealed substantial reluctance to do so and apparent disagreement among the leaders on this score as well. Clearly, as was apparent in Poland in both 1956 and 1980-81, the Soviet leaders are prepared to run considerable risks in order to *avoid* military intervention. They are aware that invasion and occupation create their own burdens; aside from effects on world (and international Communist) opinion, they harm prospects for economic growth, damage popular morale, and endanger the efficacy of the civil contract in general in the country concerned. Thus is the value of the entity preserved diminished by the means of preservation.

There is a body of Western thought that believes that a final decision by Moscow to use armed force to suppress a "revolt" in Eastern Europe rests less on the Soviets' apprehensions about the essential character of that "revolt" than on their calculation of the odds that the intrusion of their forces would encounter determined, organized resistance from indigenous military forces and militia.<sup>48</sup> It is argued that, if the Soviets conclude that they will have to fight on a large scale, they will not invade.

<sup>48</sup> See especially Christopher D. Jones, *Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1981), pp. 60-105. Jones makes this argument via a review of appropriate East European "case histories" and quotes a variety of academicians, journalists, and East European figures who seem to agree.

Confidential

**Confidential**

Unquestionably an estimate that Soviet armed forces would meet fierce and possibly prolonged resistance would have a substantial effect on Soviet decision-makers. Such an estimate may indeed have accounted for Stalin's somewhat surprising failure to act militarily in the case of Yugoslavia in 1948 and contributed to Brezhnev's reluctance to invade Romania in the late 1960s. Past circumstances are thus suggestive—the Soviets actually invaded only in those instances when massive opposition seemed unlikely (as in Czechoslovakia in 1968), and they did not invade when it seemed likely (as in Poland, 1981). But the contention that the prospect of battle is *the* determining factor for the Soviets certainly cannot be proved. Other considerations may have played a larger role: could the problem be resolved by means other than military, as it was twice in Poland; or would the problem pose a serious threat to Communist rule in the country concerned or to Soviet dominance of the Bloc as a whole, as the Romanian challenge did not.

So the essential question remains: will they or won't they? If this cannot be answered definitively, one can at least make a fairly firm estimate, and it is almost certainly the same most East Europeans would make: yes they will, if persuaded that the alternative would be tantamount to the loss of a Bloc state.

#### **The Way of the West**

The influence of the West on the course of Eastern Europe and on the character of Soviet-East European relations is not easily quantified. Some specific Western actions have had an enormous impact on Eastern Europe—the Marshall Plan, the formation of NATO, the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany—but these have almost always been addressed in the first instance to other areas and other problems (postwar reconstruction in Europe, the Soviet threat to Europe, the continued division of Germany). To be sure, some major Western policies have been specifically directed toward Eastern Europe—for example, support of Yugoslavia—but rarely so, and the lack of a clear policy—for instance, concerning Hungary in 1956—sometimes has seemed at least as significant.

Detente affected Eastern Europe in different ways. Because it provided incentives for restraint in Soviet policies in Europe in general and tended to dampen

any Soviet enthusiasm for a tough line toward Eastern Europe in particular, the improvement of East-West relations in the 1970s facilitated a quiet growth of autonomy in several East European capitals and, of course, expanded contacts between Eastern and Western cultures and economies. Some East Europeans seemed to feel that in the long run detente would permit their countries to move (perhaps together with some West European states) toward a kind of non-alignment, and to this end they urged the dissolution of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

At the same time, relative tranquillity and prosperity in Eastern Europe made the job of the Soviets in the area easier politically and less burdensome economically. Aware of a possible drift toward Western Europe, Moscow continued to insist on the need for continuing ideological conflict and stepped up efforts to use CEMA to strengthen its own hold on East European economies.

It is in the area of economic relations that the West now plays its largest direct role and could exercise the greatest leverage. But current Western financial caution and skepticism in the face of burgeoning Eastern economic problems will circumscribe relations for some years to come. West European nations are in any event chary of seeking to use economic means for political purposes (unless these purposes are rather grand, abstract, and remote).

The growth of independence in Eastern Europe might in the long run be spurred by a resumption of detente and Western economic support, especially if the West conditioned the maintenance of its good will and aid on the character of Soviet policies there. But there can be no guarantee of this. Certainly prosperity alone does not assure a more independent or enlightened approach by any particular East European regime, as East Germany has demonstrated for quite some time.

It is also possible that economic difficulties could lead to a decline in Soviet hegemony. Popular pressures arising initially from economic discontent can broaden into an array of demands—for democratization,

**Confidential**

sovereignty, and so forth—and local regimes can be persuaded to comply. But if such demands and such compliance go too far too fast, the Soviets are likely to interfere and try to force a reverse course.

The West's most influential role in the area is probably passive. Its mere existence offers an attractive political, economic, and cultural beacon to the peoples of Eastern Europe and an alternative source of ideas and support for the regimes. These are not, to be sure, very dramatic means of suasion, but they help hope to survive, and it is, ultimately, hope that will provide much of the fuel for the next great move toward change and freedom in Eastern Europe.

#### **Elastic Deformation**

Precisely where and when such a move might take place is not an easy calculation. The inclination of the Poles and Hungarians to make trouble for their own regimes and for their Soviet overlords should not have come as any great shock to observers familiar with their history and national character. On the other hand, the willingness of the Czechoslovaks to transform their system in a revolutionary way and of the Romanians to defy Moscow was indeed surprising, given the generally acquiescent traditions of the Czechs and the seedily opportunistic nature of most Romanian governments.

A lesson of the recent past may be that, while it is not possible to single out the prime candidates much in advance, *all* of the East European states of the Soviet Bloc are potentially disruptive. Indeed, as has been said of contemporary Poland, the structures of control are in place throughout the area, "but just barely—[what we see is] a crumbling facade with a scaffold around it." Nine times since the end of the war, facade and scaffold have threatened to fall or been torn down, an average of once every four years or so.

Thus the estimate: over the course of the next decade there will be further outbreaks of serious political strife in Eastern Europe, and they will be directed at least in part and implicitly against the Soviet Union. At the same time if such strife seems to jeopardize Communist power and/or Soviet hegemony, Moscow will almost certainly intervene with military force, if necessary.

Beyond a decade, however, forecasts become much murkier. The resolution through force of recurrent imperial problems that have deep political, economic, and social roots cannot be endlessly appealing in Moscow; it exacts a form of payment—in "socialist" credentials, international prestige, economic resources, and even, perhaps, self-esteem—that is hardly negligible. Radical changes in the ways the Soviets maintain their empire, the local regimes preserve their power, and these regimes conduct their economic affairs do not now seem at all likely. But time, succession struggles, political crises, and economic adversity may whet the appetite for systemic change, even in the Kremlin. Major disruptions and manifestations of high-level discord within the USSR—comparable, for example, to those which followed Stalin's death—could do the same.<sup>49</sup> Thus, while even a qualified prediction of fundamental shifts in Soviet policies toward Eastern Europe would certainly be premature, it does seem reasonable to suggest—largely on the basis of the preceding estimate that Eastern Europe will remain a source of trouble—that the *chances* of such a shift will probably grow.

Many students of the area, in fact, foresee major changes in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet position there over the next few decades, and most seem to be at least moderately optimistic about the nature of those changes. Thus Zbigniew Brzezinski, focusing on the erosion of ideology and the growing feeling among East European Communist elites that the Soviet-dominated Bloc brakes the "domestic fulfillment of their social goals," suggests that the empire and Communist dictatorships might survive in form but not in substance.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> In 1955, presumably inspired by fears of disorder in Eastern Europe and on the home front as well, Soviet Premier Malenkov was so eager for peace and coexistence abroad that he may have sought a "far-reaching accommodation in Central Europe," including even the reunification of a nonaligned Germany, accompanied by a withdrawal of all foreign forces, and a Soviet withdrawal from Poland as well. (See Vojtech Mastny, "Kremlin Politics and the Austrian Settlement," *Problems of Communism*, vol. XXXI, July-August 1982, especially, p. 41.)

<sup>50</sup> Brzezinski, op. cit., pp. 511-512.

**Confidential**

**Confidential**

Fritz Ermath, citing the corrosive effects on Soviet hegemony of East European nationalism, socioeconomic modernization, and liberalism, believes that "a regime different from that of Brezhnev . . . might be attracted by the opportunities of a more assertive and flexible policy" but that if this does not help, "one may . . . hope that the development of the Soviet state and society opens the alternative of systemic reform." He adds that if the Soviet system simply calcifies, "then an alternative system could arise in which liberal principles could dominate Soviet domestic and international politics." While trends in this direction "are not inevitable or even encouraging . . . a combination of good fortune and good [Western] statesmanship might someday bring [the USSR] to be ruled by politicians who are not, by instinct or ideology, imperialists."<sup>51</sup>

J. F. Brown, anticipating a succession crisis or series of crises in the USSR, writes that the future of Soviet hegemony is very uncertain. Soviet authority in Eastern Europe, he argues, might decline; factionalism in several leaderships might become more intense and open; some leaders might orient their policies along more national lines; groupings of East European states might form; pressure for seeking closer collaboration with the West would likely grow; and so on.<sup>52</sup>

A theoretician and methodologist, political scientist Jan F. Triska, adds his own particular perspective of the Bloc:

*With obsolete organizational structure and without an association theory upon which a modern, rational organization could be built, the communist system organizers are doomed to patching-up, temporizing, and holding operations, which in their sum total, are inadequate even for system maintenance, let alone for the socialist development and system development of the communist party-states. Politically stagnating and economically inactive, the system becomes increasingly vulnerable to adversaries at home and abroad.*<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ermath, op. cit., pp. x-xi.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, op. cit., pp. 126, 127.

<sup>53</sup> Jan F. Triska, op. cit., p. 22.

Finally and most boldly, Harry Schwartz simply forecasts the end of empire:

*[The East European] nations remain spiritually unconquered and politically indigestible. . . . The West has consistently tended to underestimate the opportunities of Eastern Europeans for independent action and their willingness to seize those opportunities. There will be more Titos, Nagys, Hoxhas, Gheorgiu-Dejs, and Dubcekis in Eastern Europe. The system breeds them automatically. For generations, moreover, the Eastern Europeans have seen conquerors come and go; it is not unlikely that the Russians will also return home one day.*<sup>54</sup>

What these students of the area seem to be suggesting or assuming is a process of decline in the USSR's political, economic, and ideological ability to hold on to its empire and a simultaneous process of fermentation within that empire which might reduce Moscow's will to preserve its position there militarily in the face of rising, perhaps accelerating, costs.

Thus, perhaps Eastern Europe will one day in this century be seen in hindsight as having suffered only a temporary change in shape, produced by an outside agent of stress (the USSR), a process known to physicists as an elastic deformation. If so, the area will have at last returned to Europe, where, as the East Europeans themselves know best of all, it truly belongs.

<sup>54</sup> Harry Schwartz, *Eastern Europe in the Soviet Shadow* (New York, 1973), p. 106.

25X1

**Confidential**

**Confidential**